

Faust Keiji Haino La Monte Young

Folk Music Krautrock Electronix Kramer

The

Stereolab Bobby Brown Amon Düül

Sound

The Theremin Family Fodder Julian Cope

Projector

Harry Partch Moondog Tony Conrad

Tangerine Dream Joe Meek Tokyo Flashback

Boredoms Hermit Rock Popol Vuh

First Issue 1996

Destroy All Monsters Kraftwerk Messiaen

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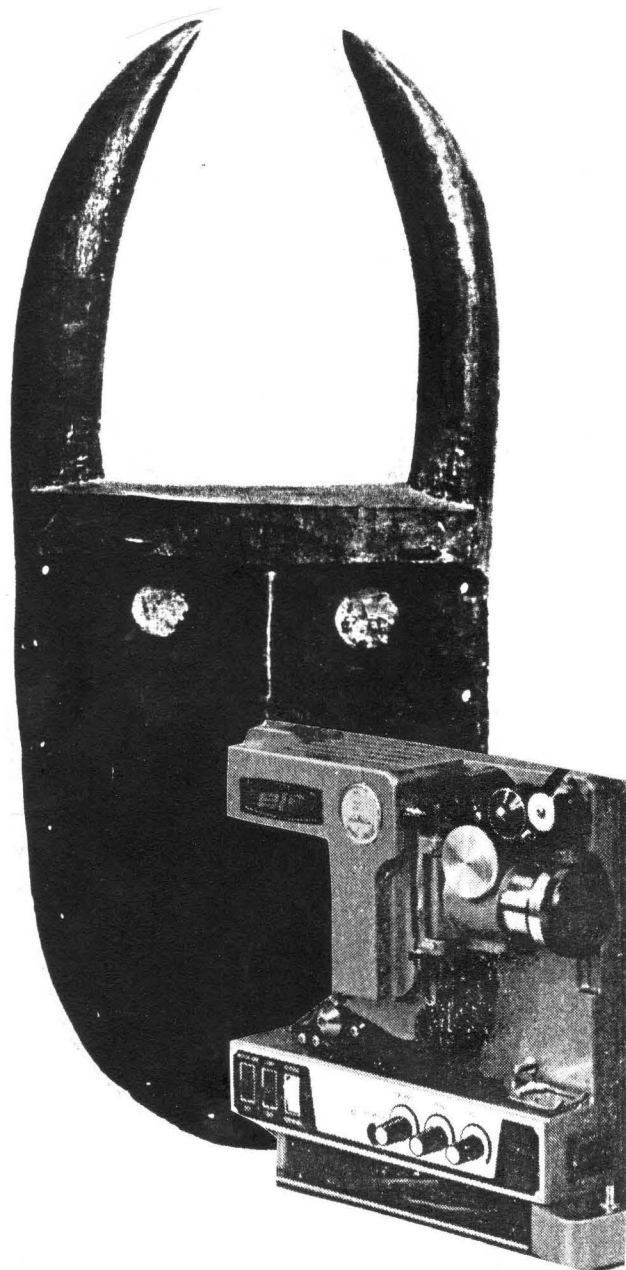
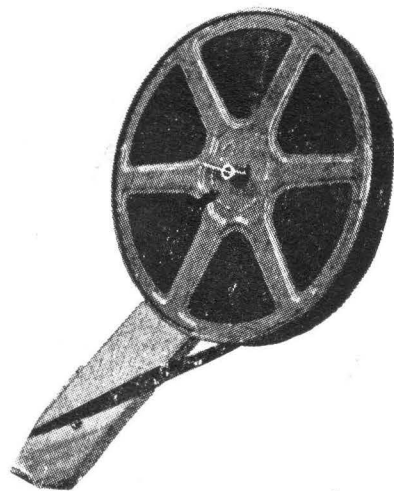
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MANIFESTO

The Sound Projector is written and drawn by Underground Cartoonists who like music. Put it down now if all you want is obsessive trainspotter information, or 100% authentic facts. The Sound Projector is personal, speculative, humorous, eccentric, and discursive - simply an open platform for ideas, pointers, directions, the million and one ways in which the drug of music can short-circuit your brain, expand your horizons, and connect you to your inner being. So please, dear reader, do not write to me correcting any factual errors you find in these pages, else I shall simply lose the will to live.

This is not a 'happening' magazine, a lot of what you're about to read is probably out of date. We refer to records and compact discs that we have purchased in the last five or six years, and in some cases to rare records that are long out of print. In neither case do we guarantee that you can purchase any of them; we provide you with full discographical details just in case you wish to try ordering them up, but also for the sake of accuracy.

Our 'subject headings' reflect nothing but the Editor's eccentricity and his love of taxonomy. (Imagine how refreshing it might be to find such absurdist headings at the Virgin Megastore, perhaps changing every month on the whim of the managers.) We try our best to come to terms with the welter of fascinating musics in the kaleidoscope before us, but separation is not the only answer. How ridiculous to pigeonhole the remarkable talents of Joe Meek, for example; we should point out his obvious connections with Kraftwerk. 'Atherwellen', on their 1975 *Radioactivity* LP, is a melody which is a near-duplication of a phrase from the timeless 'Telstar', hence Ralf and Florian's tribute to a fellow genius-boffin of electronics. Like Meek, they opted for very simple melodies; perhaps both were so absorbed in their programming and splicing activities that the tune was the last thing to be worked out. In Kraftwerk's case, the technology demanded this simplicity; as for Meek, well...he was just a simpleton! Nonetheless, with his pioneering use of clunky analogue electronics for music-making, and with one of his eye-sockets glued firmly to a telescope surveying the wonders of outer space, there is no doubt that Joe Meek can be dubbed 'The First Krautrock' - yet he wasn't even born in Cologne! Remember you read it here first.

Where uncredited, all writings and drawings are by Ed Pinsent. I have assigned writing credits to my worthy

constituents where appropriate. But there is a collaborative side to the project...ideas have been generated not completely in isolation, but through chance remarks, phone conversations, letters and discussions. By the same token, I have used some ideas which came up in conversations with Edwin Pouncey, and tried to identify these where they occur. I am also greatly indebted to the latter for supplying me with the greater part of the CDs described herein, for facsimiles of rare sleeve art, and for his overall guidance and expertise in many specialist areas of music and record-accumulating.

Ed Pinsent (= Editor)

Marc Baines

John Bagnall

Harley Richardson

Edwin Pouncey

Bosco Hazard

Chris Butler

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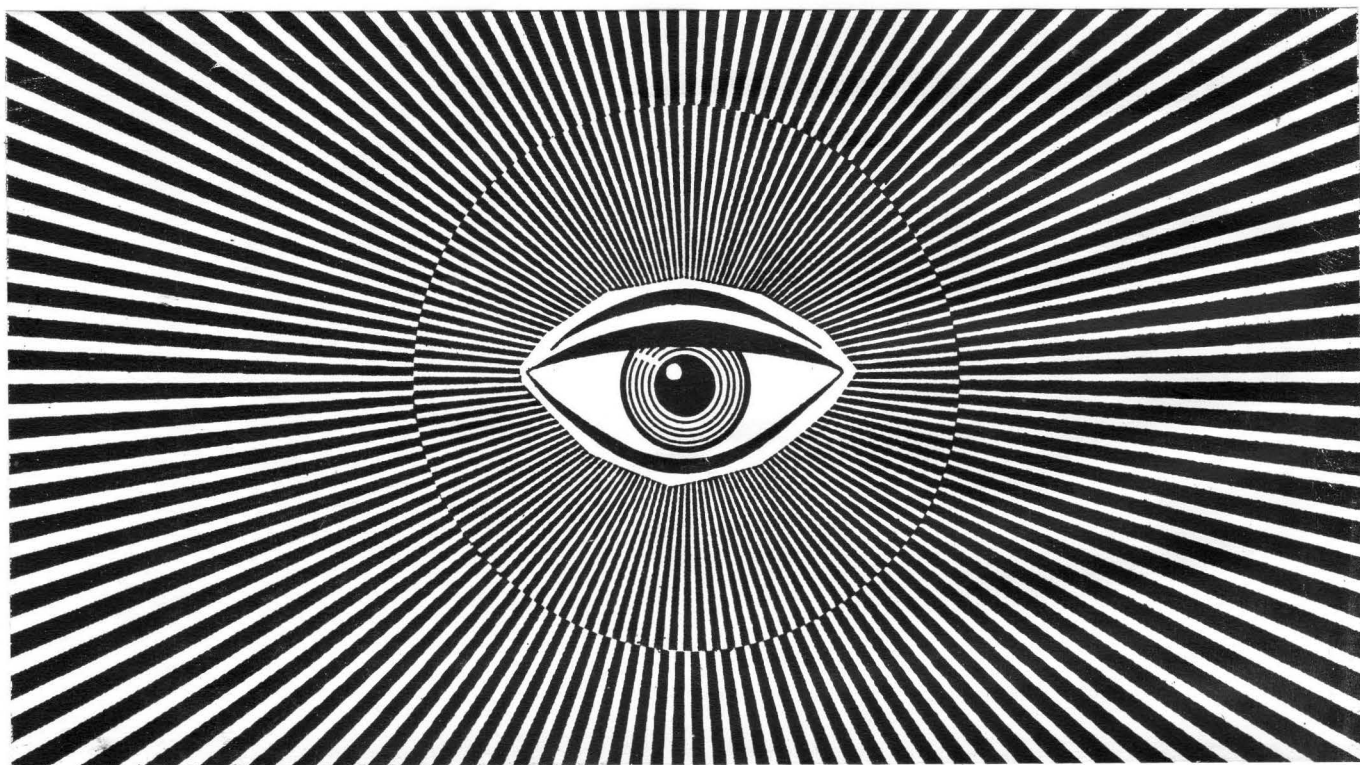
The image on page 27 is a detail of a photograph by Z V Vasovic. It has been reproed from the LMC programme for the concert at the QEH on 17th February 1995.

Please address all correspondence to the Editor at

Late Additional Notes

Amon Düül: inexplicably, the article fails to stress what an important and excellent record *Psychedelic Underground* is. Being a cheapskate, I haven't yet bought the Captain Trip CD version of this as I already owned a late vinyl edition of it. Retitled *Minnelied*, it was issued in 1973 on the Rock On Brain label (a budget priced offshoot of the famous Brain label), Catalogue no 0040.149. It features boring (and sexist!) sleeve art in contrast to the photocollage mind-melder of the original.

Popol Vuh: a tangled tale lies behind the soundtrack[s] to *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, which I can't begin to explain. You can however buy a fine Italian CD on HIGH TIDE, TIDE 9113-2 (1992), which contains both *Brüder des Schattens - Söhne des Lichts* and *On The Way To A Little Way*.



Music and Me August 1996

By Chris Butler

July 1994. I'm buying CD singles for a quid a shot from independent record shops. One is **Vaya Con Dios**. I saw them on MTV in Porto. I was teaching English in the evenings there, weekdays until ten pm. I shared a flat with two other teachers, Richard and Fizz. We'd go out drinking after work, and stick the telly on when we came back. Back in Sheffield for the summer, I was nostalgic for Porto, a steady income and eager drinking partners. That's why I bought the Vaya Con Dios single 'Heading for a Fall'. It's bland Euro-Soul. The cover photo has the pretty singer in close-up, in scarlet blindfold against a circus knife-thrower's board. I force myself to like the singe, and play it every evening when I cook the tea. The **Jamiroquai** single I've bought will impress Richard when I go back.

June 1993. I used to make my own music. I can play chords on my electronic keyboards, but don't have any decent recording apparatus. So the sound I get is too tinkly. I invest a lot of creative energy in devising ways to dirty up the sound. I record a backing track that sounds like a kid on a respectable Yamaha. I sellotape the microphone of my tape recorder to the left-hand speaker of my hi-fi. Then I fasten a toilet roll over the microphone, and wrap the whole in a few socks. I then blast the backing track at full volume out of the left-hand speaker and scream the vocals from above. I have to forget that I'm screaming into a sock encasing a toilet roll.

Sometimes I remember and it leads to ad-lib lyrics. One song about lost love has 'I'd even sing down a toilet roll for you'.

September 1995.
Country Music phase.

Early Dolly Parton, trapped in 8 year old girl's voice. **Waylon Jennings** surprisingly good. I play it at tea-time, while we eat.

Matthew is staying with us. He and Karen object to the country music. "Why!" says Karen (she addresses it to Matthew; it could mean either "why is he listening to this stuff" or "why is he doing this to us?"). Matthew answers "inner conflict".

November 1993. The way they make their coffee here in Portugal, you have to sip it. It's bitter like new grass. And after six hours of bouncing dry boulder music in the "Swing" night club (trance, hardcore I've since learnt to call it) we walk out humbled towards the tintinnabulum, stopping at a cafe with one of the black dancers who dance half naked and shining on the podiums. We think the club is called 'Swing' because paid stooges sporadically attach themselves to the industrial ceiling grid, hooked behind the knees, and, dangling, cavort to the music. The dancer and Richard are talking in Portuguese so I order a double black coffee to keep me awake. It's 7 am. The staff are still sweeping up yesterday's noise and I can't hear much. I go to the toilet. Asking the way, I hear my own voice inside me and on my chest, but I can't hear anything outside me except the brooms scratching.

Working at the Royal Mail, May 1996. While we were sorting letters, I said to Lee: "So, you like Radio Hallam then?". He smiled, wincing. He's got a handsome Chicano beard. A lean face, and long straight brown hair in an unaffected pony-tail. "It's a terrible radio station," he says, "I think they've got some kind of deal with Royal Mail, I was working out at Totley, and it was the same as

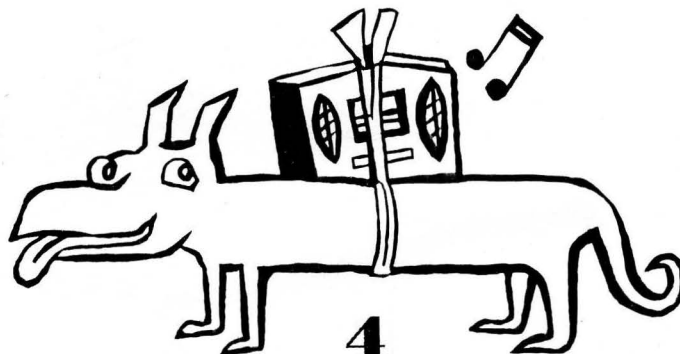
here, the only station you could get a decent reception on. Except for Virgin, but you had to keep walking around." "We could strap the radio to a dog." I often recur to dogs. I'm interested in the idea of a factory dog that lives off tidbits alone. "It's worse when the person sitting next to you starts singing along to it". "Yeah", I say. He goes on: "Once I had this bloke singing on one side of me, and on the other, this bloke whistling...". "The same tune?". "Yeah..." he thinks. "But about 16 beats behind." I laugh. "It's a wonder there's not more violence." He nods.

"They ought to have Dance FM on instead", I suggest, "it'd get the place moving." "I think that'd be a bit too lively for the folks in here." 'Dancing on the Ceiling' came on. "A bit livelier for you." A chubby bloke passed, whistling. "At least we haven't had Oasis yet this morning."

I've notice though, to be fair, when I'm sent off with bundles of mail to various places around the factory floor, that a lot of the other area don't play Radio Hallam. They bring in tapes, and it's an eclectic mix. Smoky jazz. **Hank Wangford**. **LFO**. Stock Aitken and Waterman - produced **Bananarama** albums. **Thin Lizzy** compilations. **Everly Brothers**.

June 1996. I leave work at 1.30, entering the spitting rain. It's warmer than it has been. I buy a CD Retro of House. Now I'm earning, I don't have to sniff around the edges in the quid a throw bins. I spend the afternoon listening to it. **Slam** are okay, but very ugly on the cover of 'Muzik'. They should remain absolutely anonymous. **The Disco Evangelists**' 'De Niro' track is fun, with a spag-western sample. I also like **Jaydee**'s minimalist riff,

'Plastic Dreams', with spiky Hammond organ. I've started buying dance magazines and I will learn, retroactively, what to call the dry boulder music I heard in Porto's night clubs.



E. I. O.



PHILIPS

electro-acoustics



Boffins on Parade

More boy scientist heroes

By Marc Baines

Tom Dissevelt and Kid Baltan *Electronic Movements, 1963*

Everybody knows the Dutch company Philips for their pioneering, quality electronic products. Their distinctive shield logo a guarantee of the functionality and good looks of their radios and toasters. In parallel their Phonograph division has a proud history of developing the talents of electronic music innovators from Pierre Henry to Kraftwerk, and beyond. Tom Dissevelt and Kid Baltan are home-grown talents who somehow got forgotten along the way.

Dissevelt was a composer and conductor, the Kid a circuitboard whiz. And in 1963 they got together and cooked up a record of *Electronic Movements*. A more sophisticated but still gritty approximation of what the Silver Apples would be doodling with five years later,

minus the pseudo-mystical flim-flam. 'Vibrations' is the killer cut. as described in the sleevenotes it *'begins with an accompaniment which mingles elements of a steam laundry with those of a science laboratory given over to destructive experiments with acids. This presently dissolves into twanging sounds, as of taut wires being cut, and into gurgling sounds, as of bottles being emptied.'* And that's not the half of it. It's really impressive how these mini-orchestral works are built up and arranged. The endings to all the pieces are particularly intricate and well-developed where lesser talents would have exited with a simple repeat and fade.

Vittorio Gelmetti *Deserto Rosso score*

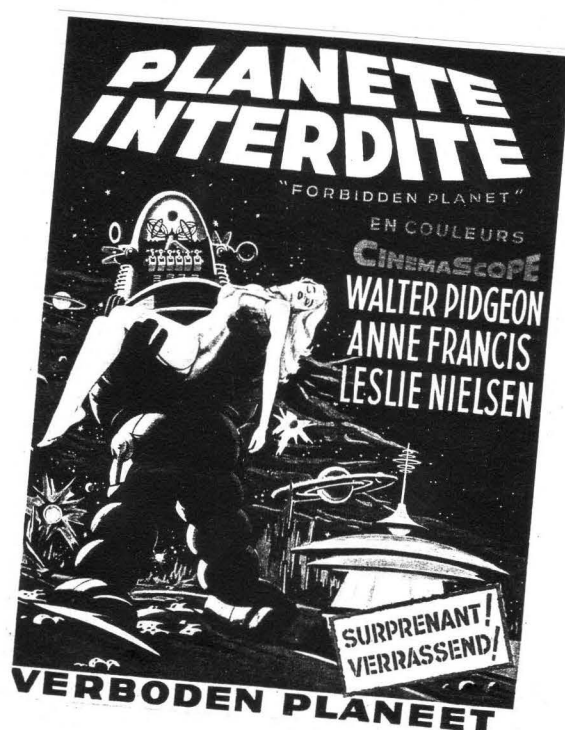
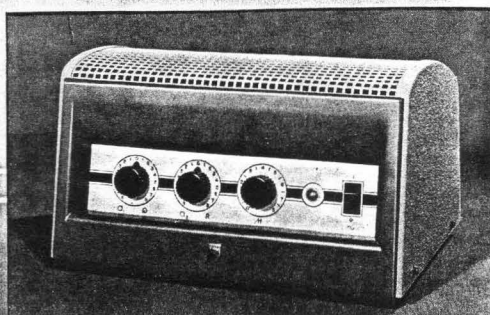
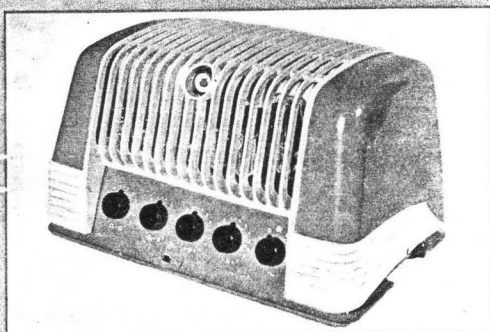
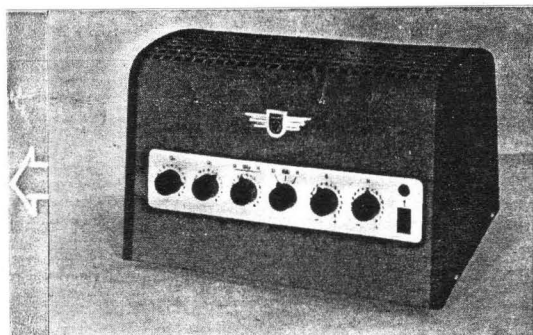
Gelmetti constructed an incredible electronics score for Michaelangelo Antonioni's film. The first scene is an extreme close-up of a factory chimney belching flames and a synthetic roar synchronised to each spurt of fire. For the next 15 minutes, while the action is centred round different parts of the factory, every scene change is accompanied by a change in texture of the sound, different configurations of hums and rumblings and overtones, hatched in a subtler and more menacing way than the bleep-bloops of *Mon Oncle* or *The Man in the White Suit*. Electronic themes reappear later on, to point up Monica Vitti's increasing alienation and mental instability.

Bernard Estdy
Electronics Volume 52

One in a series of 80-odd discs of sound effects / incidental music issued in 1975 for radio and TV record libraries. Estdy's tracks alternate with Alan Feanch's electric piano mood sketches, using moog, organ and percussion to create his very own 'Ring Cycle': 'Pop Ring', 'Bingo Ring', 'TicTac Ring', 'Implacable Ring', and 'Pussy Ring'. The last a funky bongo-slapping groover that suggests Bernard was well acquainted with genital piercing way before the current fashion. It wouldn't sound out of place of London's hep Blow-Up club among the Hammond workouts and mod rarities.

Louis and Bebe Barron,
***Forbidden Planet* soundtrack**
Crescendo (reissued on Small Planet
PR-D-001)

The Brady and Hindley of noise manipulation. Responsible for premeditated acts of violence against electronic components - distressing circuits until they'd scream out, monitoring their squirming and



bleeding as they'd settle back to an even keel. Some say Louis and Bebe would leave those big tape spools running while they'd head out in their fancy low-slung sportscar to paint the town red, obviously knocking back glass after glass of champagne and bragging to friends about their little 'experiments'. Like Charles Manson's *Lie, Love and Terror Cult* LP the Barrons' 1956 *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack remains in print. Read more about them in *Incredibly Strange Music Vol 2*.

Delia Derbyshire

The original recording of the *Dr Who* theme has an unsettling impresciseness unwrinkled by later updates - a grinding, sucking vortex of mystery composed by Ron Grainer, but generated, shaped and realised in the labs of the BBC Radiophonics Workshop. 1962 it was recorded and that's the year Delia Derbyshire joined the workshop, straight from her maths and music course at Cambridge. A 1971 commercial release of BBC Radiophonics music has several Derbyshire tracks. Her maths background evident on the Playschool-ish progress of 'Mattachin' and on 'Door to Door', a frivolous collage of doorbell rings and buzzes and the chapping of knockers. 'Blue Veils and Golden Sands' hangs and drips and wanders its own way, bearing out her favoured work method in 'attaching more importance to the musical quality of the individual sounds than to the musical argument'. 'Ziwezih Ziwezih Oo-Oo-Oo' is a Kurt Schwitters-y piece with vocoder and a warped harpsichord melody that could be (and has been) mistaken for an early Residents recording.

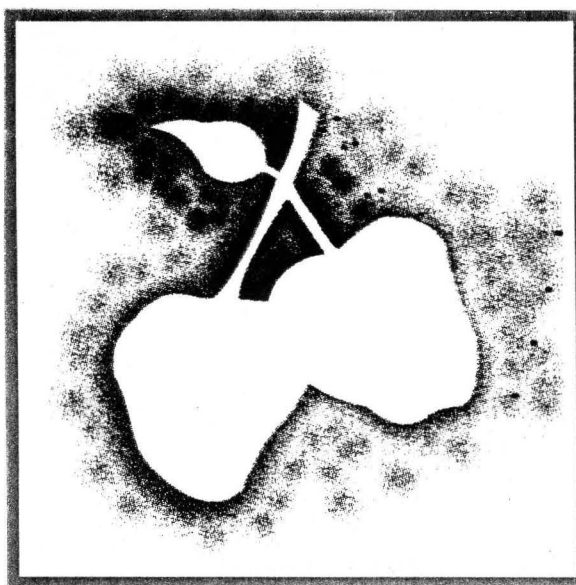
Silver Apples, *Silver Apples* (1968) and *Contact* (1969)
Germany, TRC Records, TRC 039, 1994. CD boot

Well-known among collectors, these are two exceptional LPs recorded in the late 1960s, on an unofficial recording taken from vinyl. The songs are magnificent, their lyrics muttered in a discursive free-form style tinged with poisonous anti-Hippy sentiments ('A Pox on You'), but the real achievement is the eerie sound. All the more astonishing for being produced by only two musicians - the drummer Danny Taylor and Simeon, creator and player of The Simeon. This prototype electronic instrument, played with both the hands and the feet, is little short of miraculous - delivering a richness and purity of sound matched only by its originality. Compare the identikit processed sounds available today via mass-produced synths with the almost organic sound of the Simeon, and indeed the work of other pioneering electronics experts - Donald Byrd's United States of America, or the White Noise; or in classical avant-garde music, the Ondes Martenot used by Messiaen or the instrument invented by Professor Leon Theremin which you know from 'Good Vibrations', or Captain Beefheart's 'Electricity'. It's not all electronix with the Silver Apples though, who also use folkie recorders and banjo on some tracks, filling out the sound in even more unexpected ways. One would love to say the Silver Apples were seminal, but it seems as though, like those one-of-a-kind masters cited above, they left no legacy of influences - their genius is exemplified on these two LPs and attained a peak of

achievement that no-one could follow.

Godheadsilo, *The Scientific Supercake*
LP Kill Rock Stars KRS 226 (1994)

Something of a gem in the way of the big noise stakes. Two brutish amateurs exploit their untutored approach to handling dangerous volumes and unorthodox combinations of electronic instruments. Most would-be artist duffers can't do this properly - they always hold back, or forget the structure beneath the freedom that's so necessary, but our plucky



duo go forth boldly into the realms of unexplored sonic atrocities and reap a rich harvest of intoxicating sound episodes. This doesn't apply to their weak attempts at writing 'songs', but works admirably when they go for pure noise, like their exit cut 'Battle of the Planets', where a mysterious found tape of a voice leads into an exhilarating rush of unrestrained blocks of feedback and reverb, filling up the acoustical space with a lovely abstract drone that threatens to blow the speakers and shatter your knick-knacks. After playing this, you can slice up the atmosphere in your living room and sell it off in cubic squares.

David Shea, *Prisoner*
SUB ROSA, A Division of The Catalogue SR73, 1994

New York mad electronics man Shea (associate of Elliot Sharp, I think) and friends create a series of pieces woven loosely around McGooohan and Tomblin's 'The Prisoner' TV show. Thus the occasional sample of dialogue, or Ron Grainer incidental music, graces sections of this disturbing 'concept' LP. Thankfully, none of the trainspotter obsessiveness of the Six of One Club in evidence, but then not much of the humour or eccentricity of the series survives either. Shea emphasizes rather the paranoia and

schizophrenia of Number 6, to concoct his own dark speculative fictions which go a lot further into the themes of mind control and No Escape suggested by the series. We're left with a relentlessly bleak view of the soul-destroying frustrations of modern society, or something like that. Not to deny this is a great noise, if you like heavy atmospherics, jarring dynamics and time signature shifts that induce heart failure.

David Shea, *i*
SUB ROSA SR79

Even more rewarding than *Prisoner*, this features works by Shea of which some are created 100% through the medium of sampling and turntabling - and can be played by Shea 'live' interestingly, although are not for this CD. Two of them use the music of the great Carl Stalling to come up with tributes to Screwly Squirrel and Tex Avery; okayish, though they don't add a great deal to the cartoons or to the original music. More successful to my mind is the long piece based on Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*. There's a very dense surface to all these pieces, judicious selection

and deployment of each musical moment; we're not being aggressively bombarded with micro-second edits like on Hip-Hop records (or whatever they call it nowadays) - rather, Shea initiates and explores relationships between ready-made musics, gives them time to grow and room to breath, and thus brings out new dimensions of narrative and emotional depth.

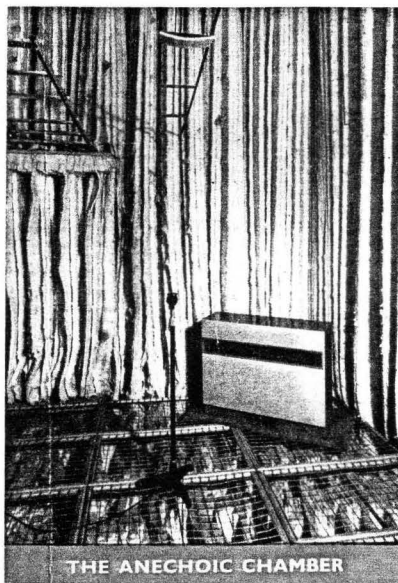
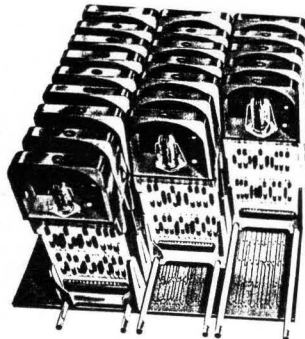
Michael Prime, *Aquifers* RRR CD 09, 1993

A solo CD from Prime who's been on the obscure electronics scene for some time, as a member of the excellent Morphogenesis; this 'watery' disc is a real beaut and deserves a place in your home. Prime uses found sources and selected pieces of his own recordings, then processes them through mixing desk effects and Musique Concrete debauchery to produce a mind-melding world of never-heard sounds. As with other such composers, knowing the methodology helps, and Prime explains in his sleeve notes how he put together a sound link to the venue's toilets for the live 'Aquatic Synapse'. The long track 'Timeslips' is my fave, where the abstract slabs o' noise move in and out of more recognisable sounds (the rain on a tin roof is just beautiful), but overlaid and cut together in disjointed time sequences, thus transporting you on a magical aural journey through time and space while you sit in your living room. Prime helps to redefines our sense of reality, hear things that cannot possibly be. I'm all for it.

This Heat, *Repeat* THESE RECORDS, THESE 6 CD

Although a long-time fan of the 'Heat', I was disappointed at first - no lost masterpieces among these unreleased tracks, but three rather less-than-necessary long pieces. 'Graphic/Varispeed' we've already had issued on a 12" single, but the

relative rarity of that item does make this important; it's also great to have that fine atmospheric organ sound on CD for the quiet moments. Reproduction is such that you can hear the splice of the loop as it passes over the tape heads. 'Repeat' is effectively '24 Track Loop' from the first LP, without added reverb effects. 'Metal' is 20 Minutes of the Heaters aimlessly banging bits of scrap metal at their Brixton studio, looped and treated. What I would like is live tapes please (if any reader can send me some I'd be delighted); This Heat were an extraordinary band, where elements of avant-garde and improv met indie rock. These Records kept fans and subscriber waiting some time before unleashing this item, shame it's proved to be something of a damp squib. More promising is the 1996 release *Made Available* (This Heat John Peel sessions from the 1970s) which we will review next ish.



Jon Rose, *Techno Mit Storungen: Ein Projekt von Jon Rose* FLAG DICH NICHT 002

From a November 1995 'Music Unlimited' Festival in Austria comes this rather flabby spread of improv, electronics, turntabling and vocal yawps. Despite the all-star cast of maniacal heroes and heroines, this comes over as dismayingly twee and polite where it should be demanding your attention, unstructured and self-indulgent where it should be a glorious free-form celebration of talents. Among those talents are my personal faves Evan Parker, Marc Ribot, Otomo, Chris Cutler, Fred Frith, and the Crown Prince of the wheels of steel, Christian Marclay. Given such a lineup, I can't understand why it fails to gell; Jon Rose is credited with 'Direction' of the project, but to these ears he's a General Custer, leading in the wrong direction and failing to muster the troops. Not to deny there's some nice noises now and again, but they're offered up like so many stale nibbles at a cocktail party, when it could have been a gargantuan 12-course banquet.

Richard Youngs and Simon Wickham-Smith, *Durian Durian* FORCED EXPOSURE FE-033

The Swell Maps avant-garde prankster spirit lives on with this duo, whose home-made LPs *Lake* and *Advent* are worth checking out, if you can ever find them. This latest outpouring is another astonishing venture into forbidden sonic worlds, collated according to a random but relentless system, from four separate improv sessions created at different times around the world. In all art, the process of creation is highly important, and usually neglected by the audience, who make judgements simply by the end-product. Here, you're required to know what they're doing before you can really make any sense of it: a map to the apparent aural

chaos on the vinyl. Stockhausen would love these guys. He wouldn't really, but I do.

MAIN, *Ligature* -

Remixes

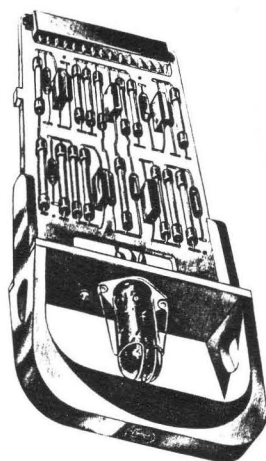
Beggars Banquet BBQM43 CD

***Firmament II*, BBQCD 168**

***HZ Series*, HERTZ 1-6**

This duo of devils, comprised of core members of late 1980s band Loop, have noodled their way into a corner of white-boy English Electronica. I very much care for this music: I always enjoy it as it envelopes me in atmospheres, but I can't remember much of it afterwards. It's virtually impossible to describe - no melody, no beat, not even a tangible sound to speak of. They are adept at concealing their tracks. Whereas This Heat's delightfully clunky experiments with tape loops and studio technique were often revealed to the patient listener, Main have set up a blank wall of complete anonymity. I thought I had heard the ultimate in minimalism - but that was before Panasonic and RLW, see below. The *HZ* series was issued as separately titled half-hour mini-discs - one per month slipped out in 1995, and the last one came in a nifty box you could keep them in. These little silver runts were wrapped in sleeve art that looked like a detail of a Mark Boyle construction - could it be peeling wallpaper, the surface of a lichen-covered rock, a microscopic enlargement? Like the music, you read into these 'blank' images what you will.

Firmament II was recommended to me by a fellow at a party - his sentiment was if you like Kraftwerk, you should dig Main. There is a superficial resemblance I suppose; but Main seem more invidious, they have succeeded in creating a music that seems to have no definition; and I mean



this as praise, lack of boundaries might enhance this music's use as a subversive tool.

John Wall, *Alterstill* Utter Psalm CD2

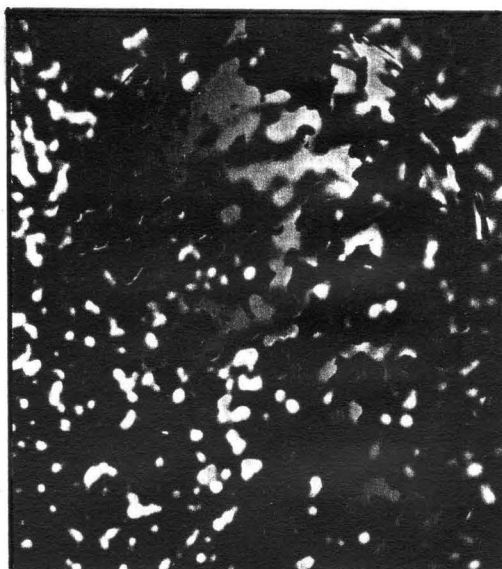
This guy's another very interesting manipulator of tape sources. The method here isn't really that important though - he's more like a sculptor of time, showing true commitment to the possibilities of sampling, performing intricate and careful collages of material that cannot (nor should be) traced back to its sources. Paul Schutze contributes highbrow sleeve notes and pours scorn on samples used on dance records, which steal

brazenly and wear the theft round their neck like a hood ornament. John Wall steals brazenly but makes subversive records out of it, like Max Ernst and his engraving collages. The disc is kinda surrealist in a fun way.

'Fragmenta' layers orchestral stabs with a vicious razor-sharp double bass attack, with a mermaid stranded on the rocks while massive cellos sail by unheeding. 'Alter Still' is a weird machine made of birdcage wire inching along the factory floor. At 1.56 it reaches the boss's office and announces its murderous intentions. 'Belief Not' is a dance of mutant gypsies armed with sledgehammers, whooping with abandon as they bounce on trampolines and smash the windows of tall buildings - one for the punk rockers! On 'Stunde Null II', the timpani in a bucket of ice slugs it out with a timid piano note - listen and discover what alien secrets these fellows will reveal. When joined by a rattling flagpole from outside the Venusian Embassy, the conversation takes quite a different turn. The gloomy clarinet adds cautionary words of doom. And then...well, hear for yourself. The overall sound has very sharp edges; you could cut yourself on the jagged shapes leaping from your speakers. Perhaps it's down to the nature of editing using digital technology, or part of Wall's aesthetic of severity.

John Duncan, *Incoming* STREAMLINE 1005

Duncan won me over with his earlier CD *Send* (TOUCH TO20), which arrived in a corrugated cardboard box plus booklet. He is the mystic master with a tape and razor blade, controlling a compelling, ethereal drone that pulls you in like an electric whirlpool. Half the sources are (I guess) shortwave radio static, a strategy which perhaps sounds tiresomely familiar to our Industrial Music readership, but Duncan has an edge all of his own. What I like is the sense of drifting upstream to a real Heart of Darkness, with no signposts to guide your bewildered



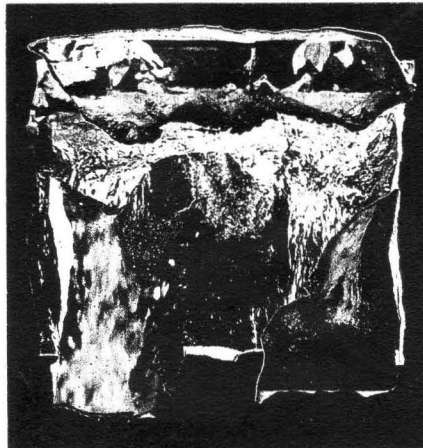
ears. The ideal visual accompaniment would be a book of paintings by Francis Bacon; together, the two of them have a fair bit to say about extremes of isolation and despair. There certainly seems to be a dark side to Duncan judging by his booklet in the *Send* CD; his extra-mural antics apparently include ritual necrophilia (is he having us on?). You're supposed to send off the corrugated card package to receive additional mailings - I haven't dared!

**Oval, 94 Diskont
MILLE PLATEAUX CD 13**

Very enjoyable and immediately accessible. If you own a CD player you've probably experienced a weird glitch when you put in a grubby disc, and it skips or loops over one segment because the laser can't read through your greasy fingerprints. This 'malfunctioning' is the basis of Oval's fun-filled techno malarkey. They somehow treat CDs in such ways as to harness these 'accidents' and use them to construct an interesting piece of music. Exactly how they do this is kept as a trade secret; no doubt it also involves a deal of studio processing. The best thing here is the 20+ minute 'Do While' (whose title, I suspect, comes from a database programming command). It's impossible to identify any single component of the source material, nor should that concern us; what you're hearing is as much to do with process as with the content. By playing a simple locked groove on a vinyl disc, you're virtually taking part in a rudimentary performance art experiment, relying on the physical properties of the record on your turntable. With Oval, we're coming close to hearing the 'thought patterns' of CD technology. The idea is inseparable from the machinery. A development like this was inevitable really - Oval aren't the first, but they sure make it sound like fun.

**RLW, When Freezing
Air Stings Like Ice
STREAMLINE 1008**

As indicated above, this is a record that makes Main sound over-cluttered. This is the sound of low-volume, low frequency samples of (ho-hum) shortwave radio bursts, interleaved with vast acres of complete silence. A challenging listen - not that the sound is at all difficult, just that there's so little of it. Taking a cue from the title, I see it as the sonic equivalent of a bracing walk in January across a frozen landscape - although the countryside as rendered by RLW is bereft of scenery, and is reduced to a blurry horizon where you can't discern the snow from the sky. When you sight a robin next to a frozen pond, it's like a significant event. If you feel you could benefit from such a tourn, then by all means bend an



ear to this unassuming record and let it lead you where it will. How miniimal is it? Make sure the red light is on your CD or you won't know you're playing it.

**Chris Cutler and Lutz
Glandien, Domestic
Stories
ReR, LSMCD, 1992**

This is all but a reincarnation of the great Art Bears - here's Cutler on drums, Fred Frith on guitars and the matchless Dagmar Krause on

vox. Here, they reinterpret the insane songs of Lutz Glandien, who also knows his onions in the area of electro-acoustic treatments. In the 70s and 80s, Henry Cow and Art Bears climbed up on their soapbox and issued strident, Marxist warnings to us all; now, the doomy atmosphere of *Stories* suggests it's already too late and all hope is gone. Impenetrable but effective lyrics, an arty-clever sleeve by Peter (will he ever give up) Blegvad, and a somehow timeless sound. Support ReR and buy this.

**NON (= Boyd Rice),
Might!
MUTE CD STUMM 139**

Having only read with increasing terror about Rice's malevolent practices, it came as a relief to find I could stand listening to this little

slice of electro-thuggery without suffering permanent brain damage. The textual side to this work is an ultra-right wing, survivalist, Darwin-was-a-softie piece of rant, written by one 'Rangnor Redbeard' (whom some believe to have been Jack London). It tries to make a convincing case for the brutal big-fish-eat-little-fish order of nature. The Natural History feel to this text made me think of quaint 19th century engravings, and softened the blow somewhat; also I was reminded of the terrible story of the Komodo Dragons that hunt you down inexorably -

once they've sprayed you with their scent there's no escape from being eaten alive! Rice deploys Redbeard, perhaps not necessarily to prove that Might makes Right, but as one of the mentors who has shaped his way of thinking. The argument holds little interest for me, but the powerful tape loops and synthy backings just blow you away. Some very interesting textures and solid abstract blasts. The use of found material includes a recording of a black prostitute being raped, played backwards - not as dreadful as it sounds, honestly. When Rice turned up in

London, he read his spiel from a huge black lectern, over prepared backing tapes, gave a Hitler-salute and walked off. As Jill Tipping pointed out, he looked as silly as Davros!

Panasonic, *Vakio* BLAST FIRST BFFP118 CD

A trio of electronic ascetics from Finland take no prisoners here with their severe, reductionist minimalism. Half of these cuts give you no melody or rhythm, just 'clean' electric sounds and oscillating tones. The opener 'Alku' for example, creates an insufferable vibration on your eardrums, like hearing the soundtrack to Michael Snow's avant-garde film 'Wavelength' in three minutes flat. 'Radiokemia' sets the buzz of an off-station FM signal against the crackle of an unplugged socket, laid out in a mathematical ratio. 'Hetken' alternates long tones with a vile blizzard of shrieks and subliminal blips, causing untold aural damage. 'Urnaia' glissandos a single tone, and sets it to tangle with a second tone before settling into a groove of white-noise sequencer beats. I could go on...Panasonic have a diligently focused project at work, stripping everything down to the barest of essentials - and even then they find more dead weight they can pare down with a razor blade. They impose a rigid austerity on you, force-feed you a diet of roots locked in your antiseptic white porcelain cell. In that cell there's nowhere to hang your hat, and your posters won't stick to the walls; the sounds refuse any interpretation, the CD obstinately remains 100% concrete and abstract like the



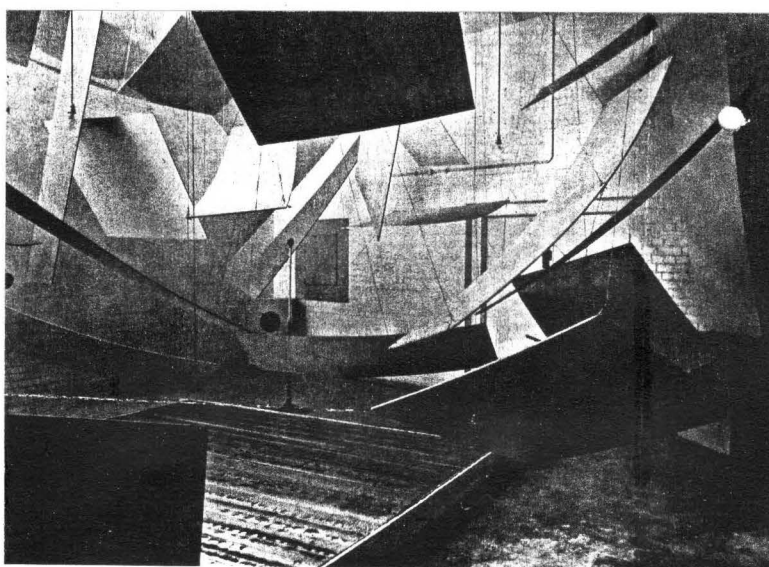
most difficult conceptual art. So it's like a jar of Instant Water - just add your own hot coffee!

Various Artists, *Variations: A London* *Compilation* PARADIGM PD01, 1995

A highly interesting survey of neglected electronic artists all currently working in London. The sparse credits, apart from listing name of artist and title of piece, merely indicate in which district of London they are based. Clutching for images, I find this information alone adds a tincture to each separate piece; it sounds like

certain areas of London are not nice places to visit. Two favourites are the John Grieve and Kymatik pieces. Grieve, on '2, 4, 5-T' immediately places you in the middle of a grim and foreboding environment, so dense as to appear to be a concrete monolith of noise. But persevere and you begin to discern the work's micro-structure, a galaxy of textures and looped frequencies. A bit like a nightmarish doppelganger of Phill Niblock. Kymatik, on 'Morphology', guide us through a splendid tract of sound-landscaping, making the performer(s) a Capability Brown for the post-industrial age. The dynamics are highly effective, one moment you're inside a blender full of vegetables, the next floating in the washing-up bowl. Also of interest here: Crow's 'Music for Blind Limbs', a cutup scramble of a girl reading a poem, with sinister echo-shuffles in the background; to listen to this is like being a blind man putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Interior sleeve art prints the text of the poem with some apt photographic works. And the great John Wall turns in 'Distil (1)', a cut not included on *Alter Still*, his high-tension string samples stretch my nerves to breaking point until at 2.25 the piece suddenly breaks into a crazy syncopated march with a soprano sax loop. And for pure relaxation purposes, why not tune into Andrew Jacques' 'ronco', the sound of a mad builder grinding your house to pieces with

an enormous power tool and shaking the chandeliers. You are the clay Prometheus, he is the evil scientist bringing you to life with his generator. We look forward to more work by all of these fellows, help pay their electric bills and buy this.



I didn't even own a copy of 'Telstar' for years, so may the Joe Meek specialists forgive my presumption in these observations on the man and his music. I can't claim to be steeped in knowledge of the milieu in which Meek worked - the BBC Arena documentary was a real eye-opener to me. Some years later, a little collection has

accumulated. **I Hear a New World**, was an LP credited to Joe Meek and the Blue Men, reissued on **RPM records RPM 103** in 1991. It's a legendary 'lost album', recorded in 1960 early in Meek's career, never officially released apart from a 'sampler' EP, but a limited pressing of the LP was made for promotional purposes. Meek was realising a particular, personal outer-space vision and the imperatives of his artistic drive pushed him into astonishing experiments with sound. He also thought the record might aid his career, though due to its unusual qualities he sometimes resorted to presenting it as a stereo demonstration disc.

Since then it's become a mega-rare collector's item, the few white label originals fetching ridiculous sums, while fragments of the opus turned up on bootlegs; this CD is the first chance for us regular non-collector joes to hear *New World*. And it's a classic in anyone's book. A feast of cosmic outer-space sounds, studio-compressed into an Oxo-cube of sonic wonderment, and enhanced with dazzling stereo effects. This, in the service of the most basic melodies and two-chord tunes you could wish for, crudely played on treated piano and slide guitar, with occasional vox. Some tunes are near-conventional surf guitar instrumentals (and were reissued on The Outlaws' *Dream of the West* LP in 1961); in other places, the

music prefigures the early Residents. The Blue Men don't sound like exceptional musicians - the genius lies in the treatment and electronic processing of sounds, to create a palpable atmosphere. Credit to Rod Freeman for devising the arrangements to help realise Meek's concepts, but the work bears the hallmark of the artist's vision all the way through.

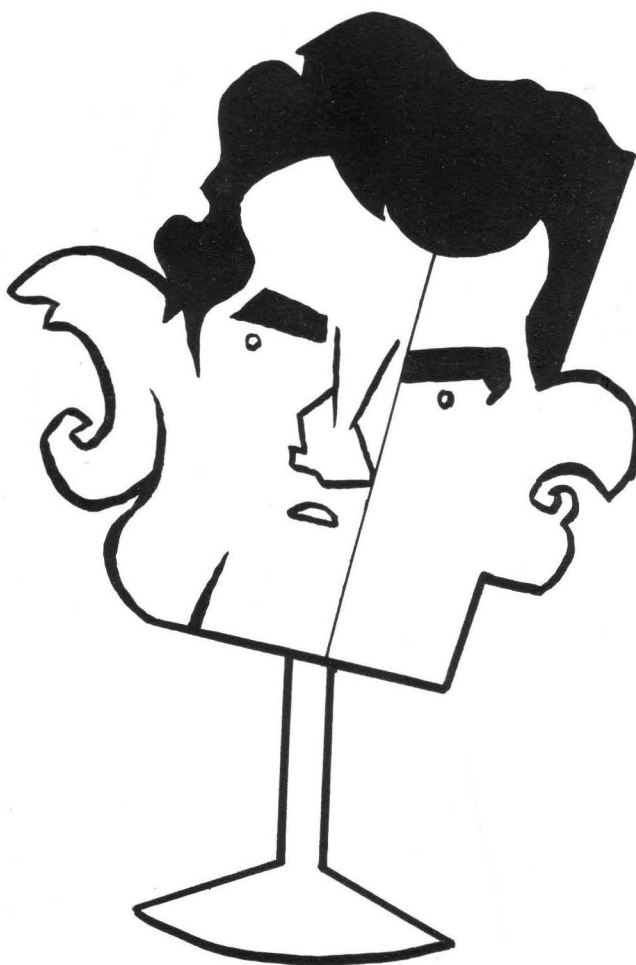
Joe Meek: The Man With Elephant Ears

And a fascinating vision it is too. A naive take on outer space totally untainted by scientific comprehension, like Bleep and Booster on amphetamines, pulp sci-fi paperback covers come to life in sound, the Forbidden Planet soundtrack rethought as Beat music. In life, Meek's imagination was somewhat hampered by his own verbal and emotional inarticulateness; on this

record, making tone-paintings in sounds (and within the confines of a pop music format, remember) he found freedom of expression. That said, *New World* is slightly marred by the dumb narrative elements suggested by the silly titles such as 'Entry of the Globbotts'; Meek's own sleeve note commentary (albeit tongue-in-cheek); and the naff speeded-up

voices on a couple of tracks, which never fail to prompt derisory cries of 'Pinky and Perky!' from some of my older colleagues. But we must forgive the artist's idiosyncrasies, as we do Brian Wilson's pathetic attempts at humour ('George Fell into His French Horn') which don't detract from the towering greatness of *Smile*.

Bravo on the remastering of *New World* (presumably from a disc, nicely de-crackled) and the scholarly sleeve notes by R W Dopson and A D Blackburn. The cover is a slight drawback - it almost matches the original but has been re-mixed and some new graphics added; the original (repro'd on the back, postage stamp size) looks splendid to my mind. Snap this up



and have yourself a cosmic party, play it in the dark on a hot August night while you scan the skies for meteorites and flying saucers.

A surprisingly good budget-priced collection is **Telstar: The Original Sixties Hits of the Tornados, Music Collection International MCCD 161**. I found one in a Virgin bargain bin for £2.99. You're hard pressed to find a better collection. All the great toons are here including 'Telstar', 'Robot', and 'Globetrotter'. 'Jungle Rhythm' builds up as beautifully as any piece of King Tubby dub - real deep and slow. Throughout, the hummable melodies are

picked out by the bright sound of the Clavioline that is one of Meek's hallmarks of invention. Somehow that unique sound carries me back to some primal memory, though as kids we never had these records in our house. Maybe it's just the early production sound that enables this time-travel for a fraction of a second. Only with the rescreening of 'Deputy Dawg' for example, did I realise how the buzzing of a bass harmonica had sawed its way into my childhood -

no wonder I crumple up when I hear that instrument on *Sgt Pepper* and *Pet Sounds*.

The double CD set **The Joe Meek Story - the Pye Years, Sequel Records NED CD 171, 1991** is also a reasonably priced item (£12) but a pretty patchy collection. The quality of musicianship and distinctiveness of talent on display is variable - Meek worked largely with rather indifferent

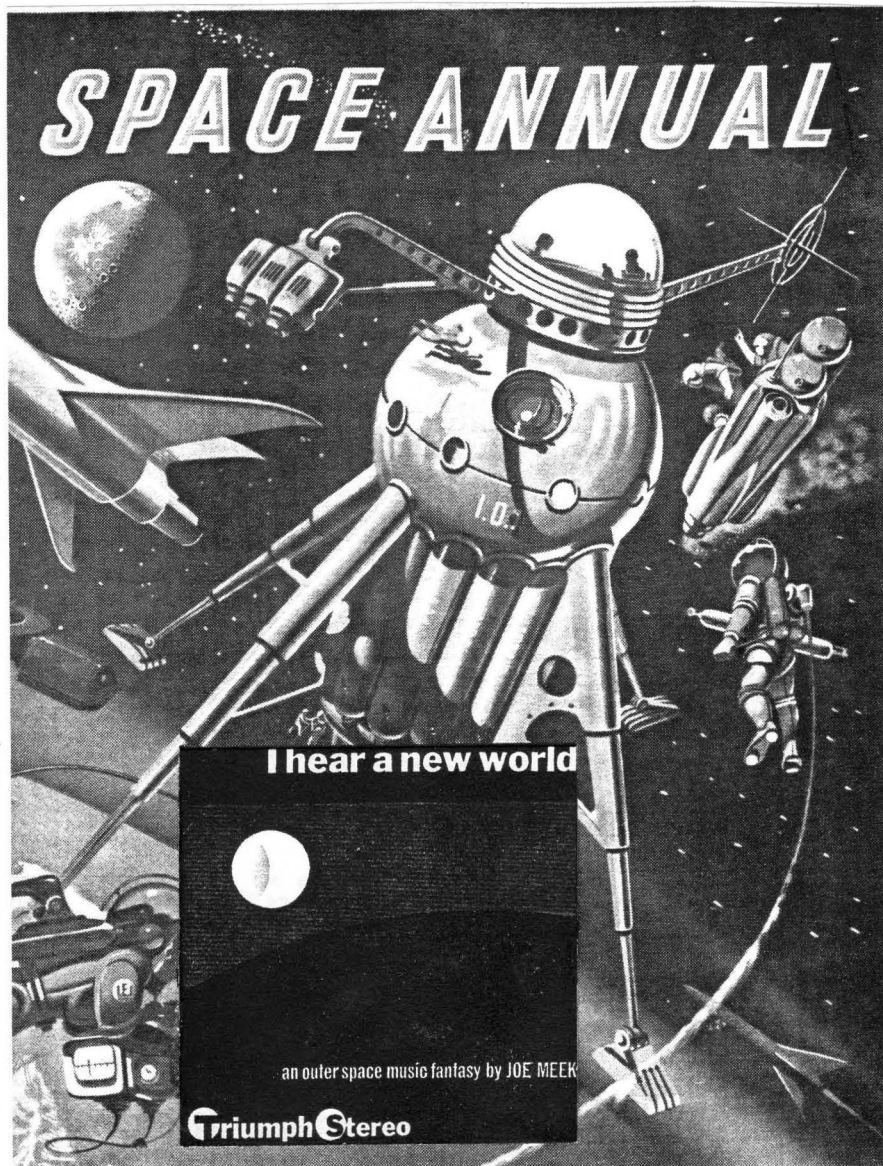
performers. The Honeycombs and the Flee-Rekkers are dependable though. Once again, most of your listening pleasure derives from the unique sound, and this collection isn't crucial but gives you some idea of Meek's versatility for the years 1960-1967. The sleeve notes are by Dopson and Blackburn again, and full discographical details are packed with enough detail to satisfy voracious archivists.

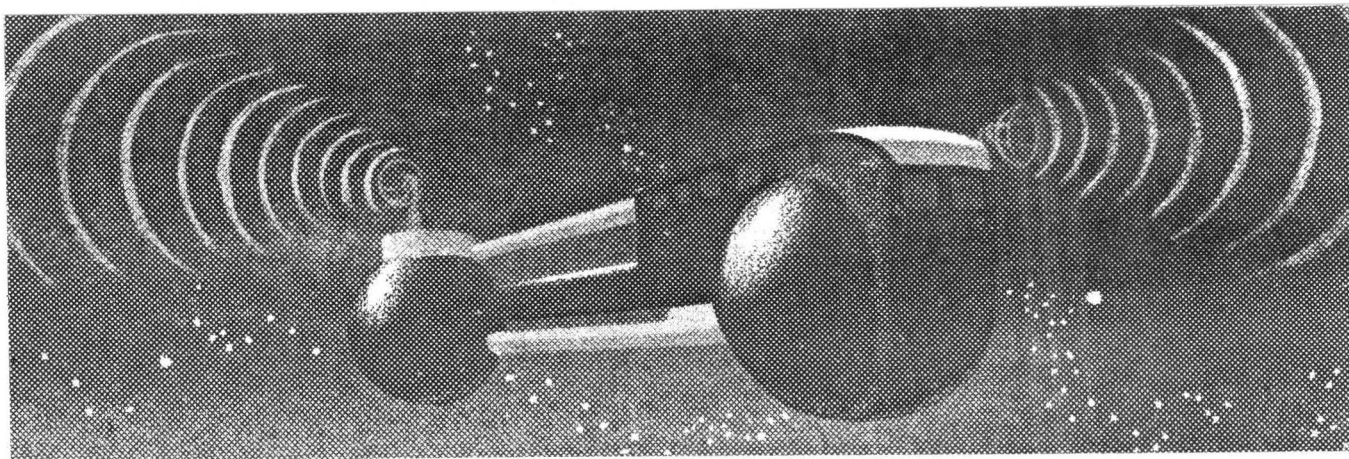
The Legendary Joe Meek by John Repsch (Woodford House 1989, 341pp + ix, plates, £6.95) is the authoritative text and a detailed survey of Meek's entire professional career, pieced together

from eyewitness accounts reproduced verbatim, press reports, correspondence, and other uncited sources, tempered with an obvious affection for Meek's music and eccentric working methods. No punches are pulled when it comes to juicy stories about the man's emotional outbursts, although effectively it's the same story every time - he lost his temper at the slightest provocation, acted very paranoid and threw

expensive equipment about. We can sympathise, but not really understand - the stories are second-hand, and offer no clues to the artist's tortured psyche.

There are some examinations of Meek's recording methods, where Repsch veers between laborious speculation as to how Meek achieved a certain effect (he's a bit hazy on details of the recording process), and immediate capitulation, veiling it under meaningless phrases. Unable to ascertain how Meek





I hear a new world



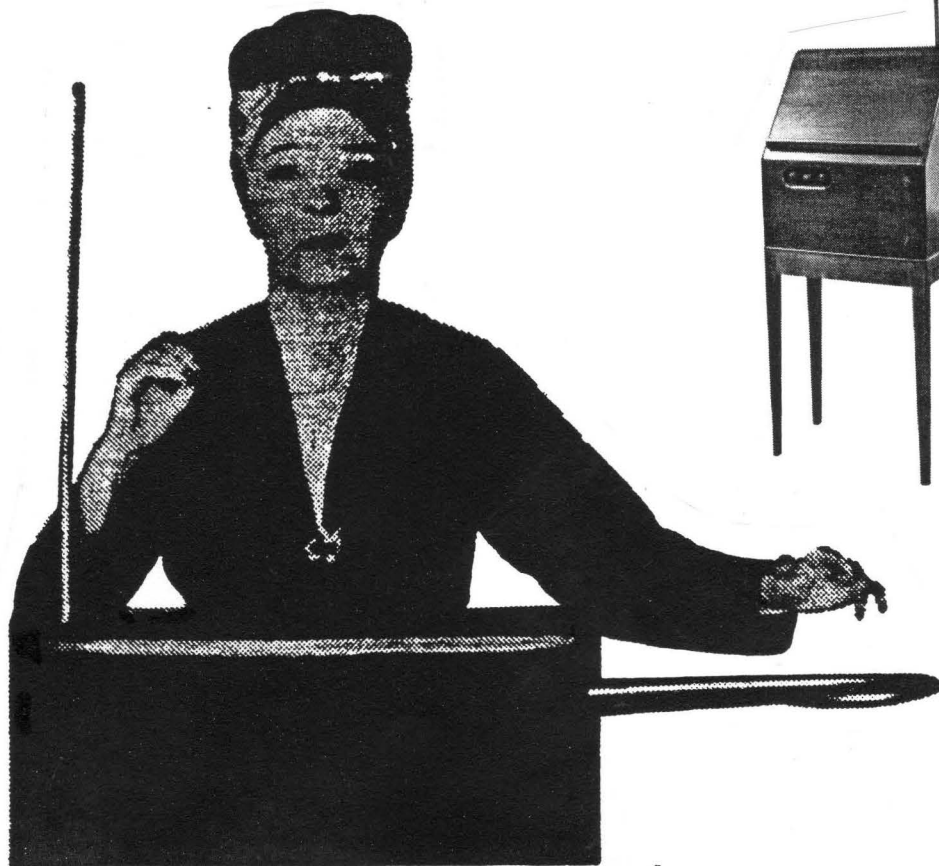
created the effective sound-montage that opens 'Telstar', Repsch dubs it an 'electronic hotch-potch' (p 154). Then there's a snapshot of the UK music business scene for this period (1956 -1967), which judging from the companies' standpoint amounted to little more than a frantic and cynical race to steal the latest song or the latest sound from the American charts, quickly record a shoddy imitation version with miserable home-grown talent, and issue it with alarming speed to the hungry public. Sometimes 12 hours would make all the difference in this sordid struggle for record sales. Why did the record buying teenagers put up with it?

Meek has been a neglected figure, but in restoring him to the Pantheon of pop music Gods, Repsch can be a little one-sided. The Beatles are only evaluated here in terms of their teeny-bopper following or within the context of the highly-incestuous Merseybeat scene, making them appear frivolous or derivative respectively. Phil Spector, whose similarities to Meek

are obvious, is introduced late and dealt with quite summarily. In each case the author seems to be taking his cue from Meek's own paranoid misapprehensions and jealousies - real sympathetic writing!

The information is fascinating, but what a tiresome read. Repsch can't help expressing himself in the most banal of clichés and well-worn phrases - there's about 2 dozen on every page. His leaden jokes and overuse of vernacular stick in my craw as much as his laborious, tortured syntax. He has a presumptuous habit of conjecturing the thoughts and motives of his subjects, none of which are substantiated by sources or supporting accounts.

No room for all the stuff about Heinz, the psychic link to Buddy Holly, the arrest for soliciting and the mysterious death, but you know it all anyway. This ain't no gossip column!



Hidden Hands

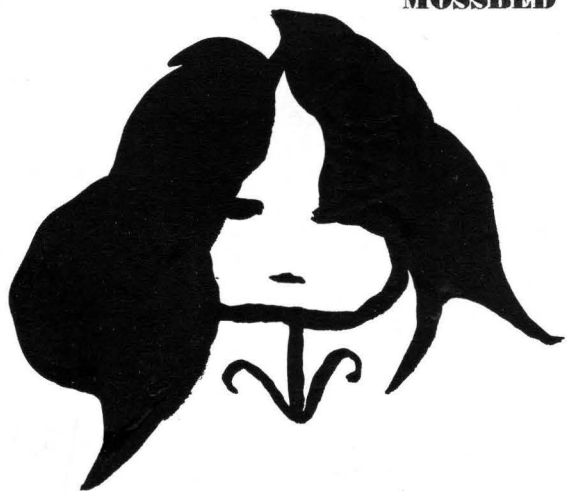
Clara Rockmore,
The Art of the Theremin
DELOS D/CD 1014, 1987

Those fortunate enough to have caught the Channel Four documentary will know what I'm talking about here: the legendary Professor Leon Theremin, his amazing instrument, and his relationship to Clara Rockmore, the latter without a doubt the only person who can claim to be a virtuoso on the Theremin. (And see my Silver Apples review above for further notes on unusual electronic devices). Let's dispense with any silly notions that we're dealing with a 'novelty' instrument, and put to one side the history of its use on Hollywood soundtracks (esp. in Sci-fi and Horror movies) to signal 'weirdness' to the listening audience. Not to rubbish that important side of musical history, but to my mind it rather limits the importance and range of the Theremin. First, note that (in the same way that basalt is impossible to carve, but the Egyptians sculpted it into works all the greater for that difficulty) the Theremin is impossible to play; if you or I get near it, it creates an uncontrollable howling. It

requires very disciplined hand movements within a limited area of space; and there is no keyboard to guide you, to relate your playing to a scheme of western notation. Thus it also requires complete stasis of the remainder of the body throughout the performance. Secondly, having mastered the instrument, to play it so as to express colour, tone, dynamics - and to embody the music with personality, feeling, soul - comes close to a miracle. Clara Rockmore embodies this miracle. Hearing this recording for the first time moved me close to tears. Thirdly, she is to be awarded a Nobel prize for her dedication to the

vision of treating the Theremin as a serious instrument, despite the neglect it has suffered at the hands of this cruel and indifferent world. And of course despite the developments down the avenues of 'easy and instant' electronic sounds opened up by Dr Robert Moog, which wouldn't have happened at all without Theremin's pioneering work, I might add! There's justice for you...maybe Rockmore lives in a parallel universe where events took a different, happier turn. In any case, pin back your lugholes and prepare for what Harley R described as the sound of 'an enormous bee let loose in the room'. Get stung!

Stop Press: In October 1994 I heard the first UK demonstration of the **Electronic Glove** by its inventor and player, Walter Fabeck. I thought of the Theremin, as the Glove also requires no actual physical contact with the instrument - the musician operates a keyboard as if by magic, fingers moving in the air six inches above the keys. This allows free-flowing clusters of notes and multiple sounds that (I guess) could not be achieved with a normal keyboard. Its hydraulics and articulated joints also allow the keyboard to tilt and rotate, giving interesting freedom of movement around the stage - the player is not rooted to one place. However the Glove connects very much to Midi technology, and came equipped with a database of rather familiar-sounding (and easily accessed) samples. The sheer physical difficulty of playing the Theremin interests me more.



Cavemen with Electric Clubs: the original Amon Düül

***Collapsing: Singvogel, Ruckwärts
and Co, JAPAN, POLYDOR POCP-2400,
1995***

***Disaster, JAPAN CAPTAIN TRIP CTCD-022
Paradieswaarts Düül, CTCD-017***

Brutal power is the phrase that springs to mind when **Collapsing** first grabs you by the balls. If German Rock is The Blues, then Amon Düül II are Muddy Waters, and Amon Düül (mark I) are clearly Charley Patton. For all their frenetic effort to strip their music down to the most basic components, it remains amazingly weird, you have to deal with a core of something indigestible. Two-note guitar riffs seem to echo with all the blackness of outer space; childish hammering on clatterbox percussion and bongoes made of elephants feet. They lead you down a corridor of madness. Heavy-handedness is a trait of

most German culture; in visual art, the clumsy daubs of Emil Nolde springs to mind. In literary studies, the narrow insistence on literal-minded analysis of the written word. With Amon Düül, they have somehow turned their own ineptness into high art. The editing helps. These recordings (and those on *Psychedelic Underground* and *Disaster*) are highlights from a marathon free-form session, afterwards treated with electronic effects and edited into bite-size fragments; a move by their producer attempting to cash in on the other Amon Düül's success. What a hope! We have here a phenomenon that shouldn't have happened, almost on a par with the miracle of The Magic Band that made *Trout Mask Replica* possible. Electrifyingly awesome and naively barbaric, they occupy the tiny space that exists between supreme technical mastery and complete incapability. It's like getting snapshots of an unknown ceremony being performed on Planet Mars. Great, great, great.

On **Disaster**, the awful insistency of those rudimentary guitar lines gets to you - the guitarist is obsessed with working them out, like a backward child single-mindedly ploughing on with a simple arithmetic exercise, eventually he'll get it right. Rhythm guitar likewise is the most basic on-the-beat strumming, no attempt to syncopate. And the vocalising is simply sub-human grunts and wails of primeval men, feeding on raw sabre-tooth tiger meat. 'Autonomes' - with glitches in the master tape intact - features two drummers panning in and out, colliding with each other, vying for supremacy in a noisy argument - they mockingly repeat each other's phrases into absurdity inside the hall of mirrors that is their echo chamber. None of these tunes really start or stop, they lurch into view like uninvited guests, then literally 'collapse' in a welter of bongoes and feedback, falling to pieces. This monster was originally a double LP, how magnificent to enjoy (thro' CD technology) an uninterrupted 70+ minutes of this gibberish. Listen out for when the hippies' offspring wander into the session and try and get their daddies to shut up, also a ludicrous cover of the Beatles' 'I should have known better'.

Paradieswaarts Düül was recorded in 1970: a trippier, laid back, folky-acoustic affair, with flutes and bongoes. Despite its quietness, the same awful core of inexcusable described above pervades this work. They're satyrs in a trance, swaying madly in a weird





pastoral setting, paralysed on dark purple wine. Immerse your feet in their cool fountain of flutes and let that insistent bass riff lap away at your tootsies. They reveal themselves as the true bastard offspring of The Grateful Dead with toy instruments. And, by gosh, they've learned chord changes by this time - one extra chord at any rate, so that on 'Paramechanische Welt' you get their take on the Popol Vuh two-chord ecstasy, achieved with about three acoustic guitars and some warbling goon at the mike. This CD also features both sides of their (only) 45 rpm single, 'Eternal Flow' c/w 'Paramechanical World' - two of the dreariest hippy dirges ever committed to vinyl - you'll love 'em!

Check out the demented sleeve art. *Disaster* spells its title out in building bricks across the gatefold, where the reissue version (also reproed on the CD) features the pink Hippy Dude in flares falling off the bridge to

be eaten by black crows in the river, while light bursts behind him suggest a UFO invasion or a limited A-Bomb first strike. *Paradiesworts Düül* has a Mandala on the back cover, painted by band member Lemur, which has been nagging away at my retinas - a cosmic wheel of fortune as rendered by Kandinsky with a trippy crescent moon and beams to the centre, with a Maltese Cross and stupid 'Master of Time' message. *Collapsing* is a black slab of glossy gatefold cardboard with a small square of white typo at centre. Just the sight of this brooding black monster scared the life out of me at first meeting, as did its vinyl price. These suckers are rare which makes these CD issues extra-welcome. The Captain Trip versions I have described were hugely costly at time of issue; but soon afterwards SPALAX whacked out a European set at more affordable prices, and the prices of the Japanese issues dropped. You can't lose.

Tangerine Dream: Fire Upon the Earth

Edgar Froese and his crew of teutonic knights, armed with Mellotron and Moog, return to lay waste the hinterlands! The essential, early work of T Dream has just surfaced on mid-price CD, complete with original artwork and 'remastered'. I have **Electronic Meditation** on vinyl, and would recommend it to absolutely anyone. Froese is joined by Klaus Schulze and Conrad Schnitzler; they create a terrifying noise, very frightening, very powerful. This record sends you on a personal Space Odyssey, completely living up to the epithet 'cosmic' rock - exploring the surfaces of new planets, not always from the safety of your starship's cabin as you're sent out on frequent EVA jaunts. All realised with keyboards and guitars, electronic experimentation and tape treatments, enriched with much Churchy organ, a highly apt sound for entering the 'Cathedral' of the mind that T Dream have erected here. The sleeve notes say that this record guarantees a 'burning brain' - and it delivers! Perhaps improvised, perhaps composed - it's a work that could only exist in the studio, where hours of experimental playing can be edited down to their most crucial moments and juxtaposed into new life through the splicing process. You learn from this why everyone thinks 'analogue' sound is hot. Tangerine Dream were as important as Kraftwerk in the discovery and use of these then-unknown instruments; astounding how well they have succeeded, and how different their approach to Ralf and Florian's project.

No less an achievement is the double-LP **Zeit**. By time of recording, the great Conrad Schnitzler had left, and it's not quite as urgent a piece; perhaps he brought a certain dark edginess to the work. Here, Froese performs with Chris Franke and Peter Baumann, both playing VCS 3 synths (and other keybds), with a quartet of cellos to add extra gravitas to this 'Largo in Four Movements'. *Zeit* remains a minimalist masterpiece, almost crystalline in its perfection. Some 'conceptual' unity to this epic, and highly cosmic once again, backed up by EF's collages of planets on the gatefold sleeve, but even if you're suspicious of proggy Roger-Dean styled nonsense, take heart and persevere. The great Florian Fricke contributes to Side One, playing his big Moog - the same one he used on Popol Vuh's debut album *Affenstunde*. Fricke was among the first people to buy one of these, and you just know it has to be a twelve-foot monster in a mahogany case, equipped with 200 zillion jackplug sockets of white bakelite. To listen to *Zeit* is to dip your very soul into ice cold waters. You are sucked into a whirlpool, washed through the underground caverns of the Moon and left stranded on Planet Jupiter. 'Atmospheric' doesn't



even come close to describing the majestic power. I think other listeners have pointed out how time slows down with playing this record, but to my mind it *enlarges* time - it carves out a chunk from our own miserable continuum and replaces it with a little slice of eternity.

Sleeve iconography. Plug into the rebirth and robot heartbeat motifs of the first album. Early copies were issued with a balloon that replaced the baby's head. A visual link to the robot in *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang. Bill Nelson had dreams about that too, but they seem pale and fluffy next to this steely vision of the future. The inner sleeve is a cutaway picture of a brain overlaid with diagrammatic symbols, a map to the subconscious. The **Zeit** and **Alpha Centauri** sleeves rearrange the orbits and surfaces of the planets themselves, collaging them into impossible configurations. A flattened, pasty-faced baby leers from the cover of **Atem**, perhaps an alien growing in the ground watered by cavernous springs, or a human organism flattened by the gravity of his new environment.

Elsewhere, I indicate the relaxing properties of Popol Vuh: in contrast, these records are profoundly disquieting. Whatever Froese's early *Electronic Meditations* were focussed on, it doesn't reassure you that all is well in the universe.

On budget priced CD reissue by Castle Communications in 1996, Catlog nos thus Electronic Meditation ESM CD 345; Alpha Centauri ESM CD 346; Zeit ESM CD 347; Atem ESM CD 348. The records were originally issued on OHR in Germany, then reissued in the UK by Virgin in the 1970s.

METRONOMIC PROTO-DEFINITIVE and MELODY CONCRÈTE

Kraftwerk: Man, Machine and Music
by Pascal Bussy
SAF Publishing, 192pp, ISBN 0 946719 09 8,
£12.95

By Marc Baines

Peter Colville was excused games because he had polio. His house was a few hundred yards from school so a not-too-risky stop off when you wanted to twag a school games. It was one of these afternoons that I got my introduction to Kraftwerk. Peter's favourite LP was *Autobahn* and he insisted I heard it. I'd been through a pile of his records already, wincing as I flicked past Rick Wakeman's *Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Tarkus*, and the Alan Parsons Project, so it wasn't as if there was anything else I was desperate to hear. I didn't hold out too much hope for this Kraftwerk LP either as I turned it in my hands and discovered the title track took up 22-odd minutes - the whole of one side! More bloated self-important classical - progressive posturings? Peter played it anyway and I had to swallow my misgivings. I was immediately (and remain now) in thrall to what Jane Egypt calls 'boy scientist rock.'



It was easy to see why Peter would be attracted to *Autobahn*. Almost every day he'd get ragged about his eccentric hobby: truck-spotting. Most weekends he'd head out on his ownsome to the A1, M1 or M62 (all in fairly easy reach of our town) and note in his

journals the make, model, registration number and direction of travel of any passing trucks. He's spend his evenings cross-referencing recent with previous sightings, to what end none of us could figure out. Now I don't know Pascal Bussy, but it's not hard to imagine him frittering his youth away pursuing similarly pedantic paths. He and assistant Mick Fish stress that in compiling this book they've tried hard to 'avoid rumours'. The sticklers.

Bussy's writing is absurdly stilted and doggedly literal, wholly appropriate as it turns out to the obliqueness and dry humour of Kraftwerk themselves. Here's Karl Bartos explaining why Kraftwerk mostly appeal to male constituency: 'If you are Bryan Ferry and you talk about your feelings and how you are a Jealous Guy then you reach the girls.' Information about the formative years of Kraftwerk members is sketchy but what there is is a delight. Florian Schneider, the boffin of the group (known to wrap up a long night at their studio / lab with a satisfied 'Oh, what boredom!') grew up with a famous modernist architect for a father, a man who was stringently self-disciplined but liked to put his feet up and relax with a schnapps and a touch of Pierre Henry's musique concrete. Ralf Hutter in an atypically eloquent moment sheds further light on their motivation - 'The culture of Central Europe was cut off in the 30s and many of the intellectuals went to the USA or



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France or they were eliminated. We are picking it up again where they left off, continuing this culture of the 30s and we are doing it spiritually'.

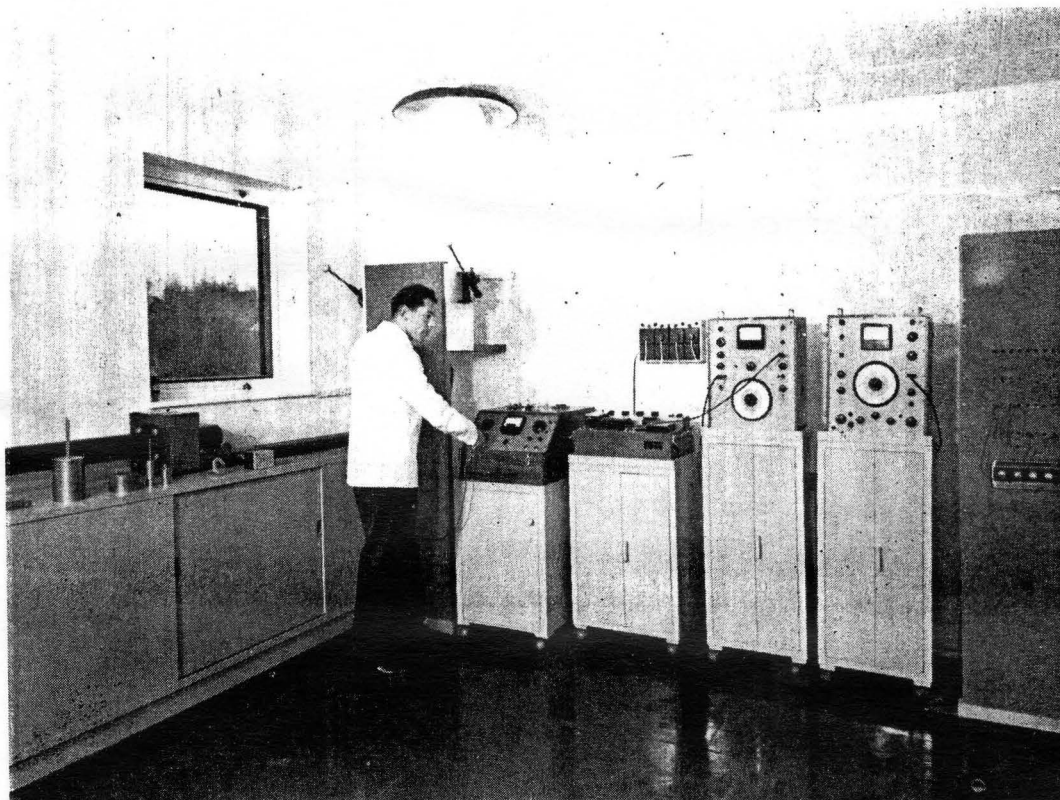
There's plenty to be enjoyed in Bussy's book, once you get past idiosyncrasies like his inability to go more than five pages without making barely-relevant reference to either Andy Warhol or Fritz Lang. But he gets onto shaky ground with his thesis that Kraftwerk's whole career is just a series of steps progressing up to the conceptual consistency and high-gloss sheen of *Trans-Europe Express* and *Man Machine*. I can't swallow it. *Kraftwerk*, *Kraftwerk 2* and *Ralf and Florian* may be less focused than later discs but they're no less astonishing. Listening to 'em now they don't, it's true, appear to be pushing the envelope of technology, but what kind of criteria is that to judge music on? It's hard to imagine how *Kraftwerk 2* must've been perceived on its release in 1971, it sounds almost fashionably lo-fi now - a raw, home electronics formulation, fresher and less dated than say 'Showroom Dummies' from *Trans-Europe Express*. *Kraftwerk 2* is brain-battering in its sheer scope, from the metronomic proto-definitive Kraftwerk of 'Kling Klang' and the melodic pop concrete of 'Spule' to most impressively, the freewheelin' improvisational - stop me before I say 'organic' - 'Wellenlange', prefiguring by a decade and a half *Bad Moon Rising* / *EVOL* - era Sonic Youth's live chill-out sections - those bits where half the audience would be mesmerised, the other half glowering or barking 'get on with it!'

Radio-Activity gets a rough ride from Bussy. It didn't sell as well as the previous LP, their breakthrough *Autobahn*, so Bussy feels he has to make excuses for the dull-witted public. And blow me down if

Radio-Activity isn't about their best record: it saved Chris Petit's film *Radio On* from being just a dull British B-Movie; Fassbinder loved it and forced it on the crew while making his 15-hour epic *Berlin Alexanderplatz*...give me a little time and I'll haul in a sack of testimonials from friends and prominent personalities!

Of course the next two records eventually made a huge dent in popular culture, exerting an influence that stretches through electronic pop and hip-hop to techno, Mo Wax, etc. *Man Machine* does sound a million years on from the early records, but mostly through advances and availability of technology, but there's a constancy to the group's work so that 'Neon Lights' (at one time available on an impossibly exotic luminous 12" pressing) has that freedom and playfulness in development, a looseness that's right there in early tunes like 'Tanzmusik'. Kraftwerk's carefully contrived image had become that of robotic demi-men, subjugating themselves to the computer age, but the music couldn't help but betray the twitching of human ears. Lester Bangs wasn't being frivolous when he described Kraftwerk as the teutonic counterparts of Brian Wilson's Beach Boys.

Maybe Kraftwerk's summer of 1983 hit 'Tour De France' is, as Pascal Bussy tells it, the result of the 'the fascination of the comparison between the ever-turning wheels of their bicycles during the day and the non-stop revolving of the spools of their tape machines in the studio at night. And maybe it ain't. It's enough to make a sport-avoiding shirker like myself want to jump on a bike and ride...if only to bomb over to Missing Records and see if a copy of *Ralf and Florian* has turned up in the second-hand bins.



Guru Guru, *UFO*

OHR/ZYZ 556005-2

***Hinten*, OHR/ZYZ 5556017**

Out of control. This bunch are a trio of greasy truckdrivers, out of their heads on amphetamines, in a huge juggernaut speeding up the Autobahn with a cargo of high-explosive Bratwurst. Guitarist Ax Genrich pushes the pedal to the floor, Mani Neumeier steers with a black bag over his head, while Uli Trepte sits in the back with an inane grin on his face, playing the nodding dog. Seriously deranged detuned guitar lines search in vain for the centre of each tune, while the drums and bass pull it inside out like a team of wild horses dragging it uphill. In fine, ultra-heavy psych played by ham-fisted yobs.

On **UFO** they take no prisoners with 'Stone In', a dirty reverb lick that's ready to smash its bottle of Pilsner in your face. 'Girl Calls' is deliciously politically incorrect, leading off with the guitars cackling at you with menacing intent before they gang-rape you with juddering sheets of wah-wah effects. 'Next Time See you at the Dalai Lhama' is a brutalistic two-note figure like a wailing fire engine siren working its way up the fretboard, while the band stand there laughing at the burning wreckage of the building they just set on fire. 'LSD-Marsch' leaves us stranded in a bleak rubbish tip during the Mother of all Bad Trips. 'UFO' the title track is a far darker version of cosmic space trips than even Tangerine Dream could muster, a real abduction-by-aliens special, dragging us unwillingly through a forest of pine trees, past mysterious metallic rumblings, a visit to the engine rooms, nuclear reactors overloading...a single-take improvised masterpiece of dynamics and textures, the sort of thing that gives 1970s prog a good name.

Hinten contains more humorous moments, such as the first cut 'Electric Junk' built out of the sort of fast-switching time signatures Zappa's 1980s bands could perform eyes closed, and some stomping riffs which stop just short of turning into a Keith Emerson organ solo on the guitar - but souped up with gallons of greasy lubricant! No less a jokey schlockfest is the excellent 'Bo Diddley' which is a monstrous barrelful of cobra snakes slithering on top of a scratchy rhythm guitar, punctuated by mad Monty-Pythesque cries of 'Bo Diddley!' Plus another two cozmik jaunts, 'The Meaning of Meaning' where the band let rip inside an echo chamber (and perhaps have fun with Mani's 'Zonk Machine'), and 'Space Ship' which simply continues the nightmare flight started on 'UFO', although its use of radio waves and distorted voices indicates an outdated piece of rusty space-junk on a highly unstable orbit across the Crab Nebulae.



Klaus Schulze, *Irrlicht*:

Quadrophonische Symphonie fur Orchester und E-Maschinen
FNAC MUSIC 662012 WM 332, 1991

An essential 1972 release from Ohr records on budget-priced CD. Schulze's other great shimmering moments in his musical career were as one-third of the great Ash Ra Tempel, and notes regarding this are included in the biog here by Schulze. This gem will feed you solid chunks of caramel-flavoured nougat to eat. The waves of oceanic glass keep on building up - Klaus is determined to bring you to point of orgasm, even if it takes all night! As an intro, he wipes out an entire orchestra using only his buzzing mono synth. At 11.00, the organ kicks in with its relentless grind; floating somewhere around that mind-massaging pulsing noise is another sound, a free-form wailing of the wind like an electric banshee in a forest. At 18.00 the whole thing starts to freak out with added oscillation, setting the piece spinning like a mirror-ball of the gods. Musical events that were previously separated in the pattern now begin to fuse together, as Schulze ups the tempo and raises the stakes. At 21.00, Saturn V rockets are launched into the mix; the last one unhinges everything and sends you whirling off into a new orbit. NB - I have a feeling that some of Schulze's later work is not as compelling. I have 1977's *Mirage* on tape and, if we must make comparisons, it has nothing like the intensity or the dynamics described above, just a lot of pleasant but pointless synth sounds, as aimless as Jean-Michel Jarre really.

Popol Vuh: Musical Mandalas

Ahh, the great Florian Fricke - in my mind I have built a shrine to his genius! Without doubt Popol Vuh remain an intense, spiritual listening experience. If we can dispense with the commonplace remarks about this music - raga-like, organic, trance music - we still have something quite magical and mysterious to deal with. They seem to create pure mandalas of sound, symmetrical music with no apparent centre, a pattern of such perfection as to embody all music, all sounds.

I also testify to the healing power of this music - it can genuinely restore your equilibrium, impart a true sense of inner well-being, of spiritual peace. Where some Krautrock proceeds from an improvised basis, Fricke brought classical elements to his music, there is a certain composed dimension to each piece, repeated melodies and themes, and overall shape to the works; this in balance to the purely improvised component. Somehow the shape, although composed, is

non-linear; where a mainstream classical composition starts at the beginning and finishes at the end, Fricke somehow manages to start at the centre and work outwards, in slow-moving ripples of thought. The overall structure is only revealed by listening to the entire piece. The normal 'logic' of linear progression is confounded.

Like many listeners, my first exposure to Popol Vuh came from the films of Werner Herzog. My favourite has to be the soundtrack to *Nosferatu The Vampire*. In my Vuh collection, I've been making do with an assortment of vinyl reissues and weird compilations for some time. After years of waiting, there are now many Popol Vuh CDs available, a lot of which endeavour to replicate the original issues in terms of track listings and sleeve art. A useful printed guide to these has appeared in Record Collector magazine. I

mention here **Das Hohelied Salomos**, SPALAX 14211, and **Letzge Tage - Letzte Nacht**, SPALAX 14213. Caution on the latter, which sounds muddy-ish on CD; I believe some of these remasterings inadvertently used deteriorating master tapes. But play either of these fine recordings in all weathers and just watch your room fill up with sunlight.

Das Hohelied Salomos was recorded in 1975 and features Daniel Fichelscher on guitars and Djong Yun on vox. This disc contains the unbearably beautiful 'Der Winter ist Vorbei', guitars join forces with a Tabla and Sitar to transport you over a snowy landscape, bracketed by a few precious seconds of voice singing the most celestial sequence you could wish for. At around 2.00 a harmony vocal is added and comes close to beating the Voix Bulgares for sheer breathy

mystery. In 'Du Sohn Davids', church bells give way to a warm stream of piano chords and a syrupy bass voice choir humming a drone. Also listen out for 'In Den Nachten auf den Gassen part I', which in less than a minute builds from a spooky moonlit vigil into a passing parade of emperors seated on elephants in full gold regalia.

Letzge Tage - Letzte Nacht = 'Last Days, Last Nights'. Many tracks hint at the ceremonies of unknown religions, such as the 'Haram

Dei' chant suggesting a procession of brightly-garbed feathered acolytes climbing up a ziggurat. Conversely, 'Kyrie' is simply a Catholic liturgy with angelic voice set to piano and acoustic guitar, exhibiting the more conventionally devotional side of Vuh. This is a good example of how the layering in of more and more guitar lines sets up a complex pattern of rhythms and intricate sub-melodies - like weaving a tapestry. On 'Oh Wie Nah...', you realize Popol Vuh have found the two perfect chords, and they're not about to change them! There's a lot of guitars on this album, but nobody anywhere is showing off - just adding the right contribution. The lack of ego in Popol Vuh's music is to be cherished. 'When Love is calling you, turn around and follow' sings the voice (in English) on the title track. Indeed, you could do worse than renounce all worldly pleasures and make a pilgrimage to the beautiful land of Popol Vuh.



Three Krautrock Curios

By Edwin Pouncey



Zweistein, *Trip-Flip Out-Meditation* PHILIPS, 6630 002

This remarkable artefact from the underbelly of the Krautrock movement was released by the famous Philips label in 1970 as a triple album in an exotic metallic gold and silver sleeve with a small circular mirror mounted on the front cover. The music contained on these records was a mad mix of primitive electronic experimentation, fractured folk song and playground chanson, all of which was meant to illustrate the *Trip-Flip Out-Meditation* theme of the album's title. How Philips (who were also responsible for such ground breaking releases as the first two Kraftwerk albums and Cluster's important and influential debut) decided to front the considerable production costs such an extravagant release would demand is mysterious, but according to one source who was present at the time Zweistein were the product of a romantic obsession.

The resident producer at Philips was apparently infatuated with a young fraulein who had an uncontrollable urge to make a record and get it released. Under the cover of darkness when the studio was empty Zweistein were allowed to experiment using whatever equipment they could lay their hands on. Presumably as the project became more adventurous the tape recorders were left rolling,

hence three records instead of one. On top of this a single ('I'm a Melody Maker' b/w 'A Very Simple Song') that didn't make it on to the triple was issued in a picture sleeve, but this too failed to attract any attention despite its more Eurovision approach. The producer was fired shortly after *Trip-Flip Out-Meditation* blundered its way onto the record racks. In a matter of weeks Zweistein's epic was deleted and sent to the vinyl junkyard never to be heard or seen again. 'Not recommended!' warns Dag Erik Ashjornsen in his German progressive and electronic rock guide *Cosmic Dreams at Play*. A warped masterpiece! say I. You choose who to believe.

Dom, *Edge of Time* Melocord ST-LP-D 001

If doom laden, acid spiked bad trip ceremonies are your secret vice then search out this fine example immediately. Dom were a progressively inclined quartet from Dusseldorf whose speciality was creating Floydian / Tangerine Dream inspired sound poems that were infected with flute and rumbling organ. There are moments on Dom's one and only release, however, that are pure hallucination as the guitars coagulate and an eerie electronic pulse beat takes over. The nearest comparison I can think of is *Psychedelic Moods* by The Deep, but whereas that record was partly processed psychedelia this is the real thing and they don't come any scarier. Recorded, we are reliably informed, after the band returned from a two day acid trip, *Edge of Time* has recently been reissued on CD.

Seesselberg, *Synthetik 1* Private pressing SYN 1

Dusseldorf was the electronic / industrial wasteland that spawned Kraftwerk, Cluster and Neu. It was also the stomping ground for Eckhart and Wolf-J. Seesselberg who partly produced this excellent album there (the other location being Hamburg). Rather than go for extended electronic drones, however, the brothers came up with a selection of shorter pieces, adding variety to their record which others failed to imitate. Seesselberg have been compared (somewhat clumsily) to early Kraftwerk and Conrad Schnitzler's Kluster, but to my ears they have more in common with New York's Suicide and The Silver Apples (minus the vocals natch!) than any of their German contemporaries. There is pure avant-pop being played out here and someone should reissue this classic pronto. Only 600 copies were originally pressed up in 1973 and these have long been snapped up by collectors or overpaid disc jocks who feel the need to sample stuff like Seesselberg into their retarded backing tracks for E-guzzling dancing fools. A pox on them!

Thanks to Steve Stapleton, David Tibet and Christoph Heeman for their invaluable help and advice with this article.

FAUST: The Riddles of the Sphinx

Faust are completely unfathomable. Though not unfamiliar with the work of this band, I can safely say I am still only coming to terms with their achievement. How strange it is to keep listening to something and still not understanding what it is you are hearing; like staring at an abstract painting and becoming aware of hidden presences, unseen spiritual forces outside the canvas. It's not like that old chestnut they all say about Glenn Branca - 'you can hear sounds that aren't really there!'. No, what I feel is something more palpable - Faust make me have ideas that are not my own, they invite me to dream their dreams. They live out their subconscious, inner impulses and smuggle them into the outside world. Quite clearly, the members of this band are insane - what's worse, they can make us share their madness.

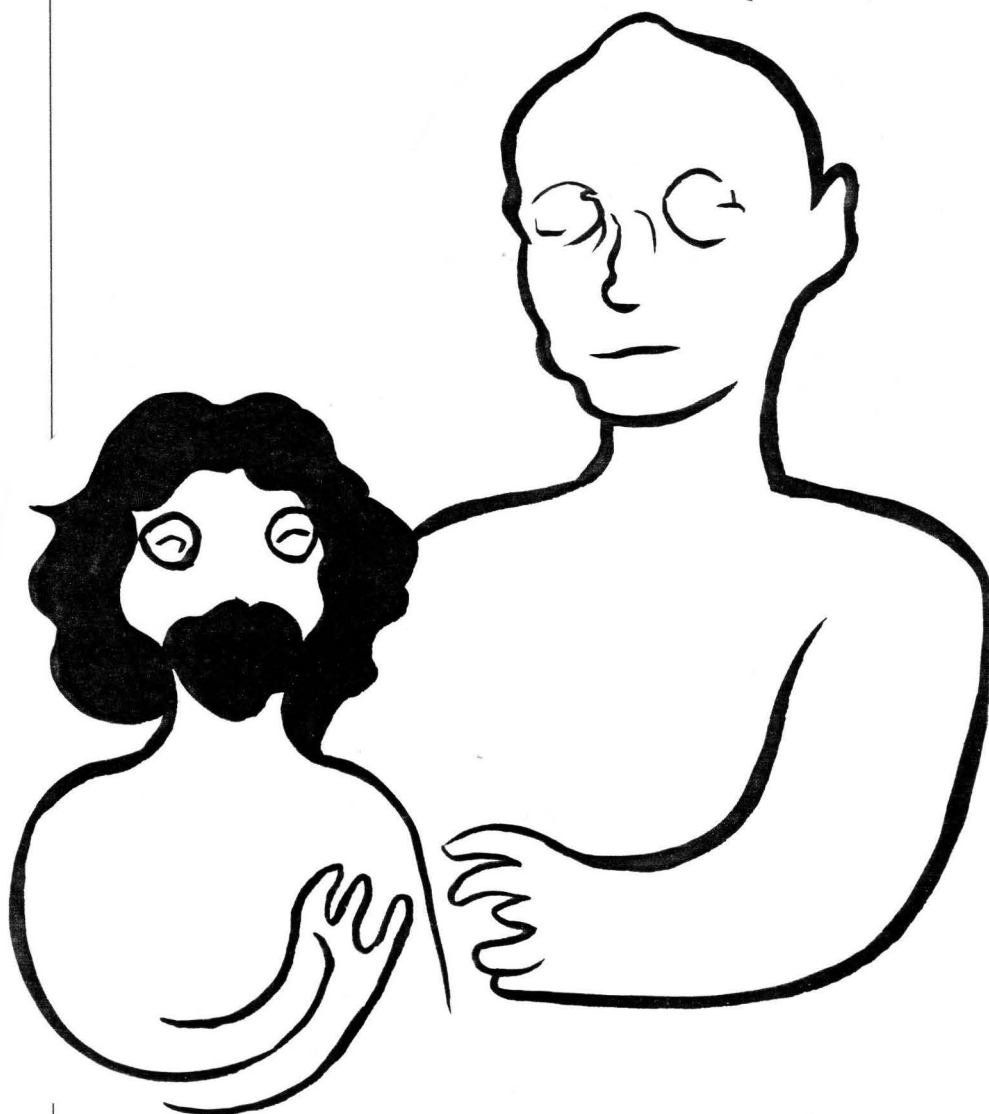
Faust 'reformed' in 1990 and effectively reinvented themselves around the nucleus of two principal players, Jean-Hervé Peron and Werner Diermaier. Live concerts followed, as did a new record. No concessions have been made to fans, no attempt to relive the 'classic' Faust years; instead, they have deliberately taken themselves apart, stripped their music down to a scaffolding framework, opened up the interior space.

I was pleased to attend the UK appearance of Faust in October 1992 at the Astoria. They appeared to be a trio at this time and the guitarist kept lapsing into different languages and behaving like a childlike schizophrenic, unexpected exhortations like 'Do you Mind if I Jump??!'. Everyone remembers the Test-Dept-ish power tools episode, road drills and other devices at unbearable volumes, and a message was carved into a paper screen using a chainsaw. A recording of this UK event was issued on CD by Table of the Elements, the Californian based label. So was another gig in Germany. They both came out in luxury formats - beautiful silk-screened, signed, numbered limited packages of cunning envelope design. Then they also appeared in 'trade' versions in jewel-cases. Either way, they're both expensive. These reunion

concerts were a totally unprecedented event; but according to Faust's demented logic, they were confidently resuming their joyful anarchic games, selecting options out of a thousand possible avenues of development.

The Faust Concerts Vol 1, TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS, FE 26

IRON, 1994. This is the 1990 Hamburg concert. It includes a word-for-word printed transcript of all lyrics (including repetitions, and vocal interjections). The record seemed disappointing at first: not loud enough, a thin, attenuated sound (compared with the richness of 1970s Faust, at least). Even the power tools sound muted and polite! However, I've learned to enjoy the utter bewilderment of it all; what is happening? When does a piece end or begin? Voices from the radio, snatches of classical music - where is all this 'found'



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material coming from, was it part of the live mix or added post-production? All of this eccentric chaos increases exponentially as you near the end of the record. After a sluggish start, things start to go bonkers in the middle of Track 3, 'The Sad Head'. This could almost be Joe Strummer playing a reggae song with Adam Ant's drummer; but then the sound of a train rushes from speaker to speaker, and the drums turn vicious and lurch aggressively to the front of the mix. By Track 4, 'Haarschart', you hear how

attenuated they can be - what they can achieve with just drum kit and one instrument (bass or organ). But the beats are never where they should be, and the bass sounds hesitant and doubtful.

Over this sketchy fragment of a tune, a found symphony orchestra tape drifts in, a joke they'll use more than once in this

concert - and it surfaces again on the *Rien* CD. Track 5, 'Schempal Buddha', as close as they come to a crowd-pleaser song, is rendered here as a horrible nightmare, as taped voices compete with Jean-hervé's multilingual ravings and somehow overlap into joining in the lyric. '13/8' is so pale as to be barely audible, a spanish acoustic guitar and percussion rim-shots. More classical music - a piano solo - leads into 'Rainy Day'; the drummer pretends to be keeping time with it, but he's really sticking to the mad time signature in his head. A single-note bass riff joins in and the singer throws out his inane repetitious dada-chant whenever he feels like it. This whole mess is so deliciously untogether you wonder how long they can sustain it (8 minutes is the answer). Lesser artists could easily let this turn into a lullaby 4/4 stone groove; Faust won't let you fall asleep for one second. By Track 8, 'Voltaire', you hear the very sound of Faust unhinging themselves, taking their already loose structure and opening it out even further: concrete poetry, squeaking chains and choppy organ surfing around their ankles. Track 9 'Rien' anticipates their next studio LP, and is the most confusing array of sounds yet put to disc. First, 17 seconds of silence; then a demented 'farewell' song as plaintive as Daniel Johnstone singing Neil Young. The collapse of this song, leading into a fragment of a taped interview: 'Why have you got back together?' Faust respond with insane laughter. No wonder. They haven't got back together - they've taken themselves

apart. This whole record is therapy for madmen, rewiring the circuitry of their brains track by track; at the end of it all they find 'Nothing'.

A copy of the first Faust LP finally made its way back to me. I used to own a Recommended Records reissue which I foolishly got rid of. I never really figured it out at the time. A good 15 years later, the blocks have been removed, I hear it for the first time.

I'm struck by the editing, and the use of found materials. For the latter, the insertion and layering of pop-music fragments from various disguised sources is not simply a happy accident - it is a deliberate attempt to warp normality through subversion of pop icons and treating familiar sounds. But it's also done with affection - hence the sleeve note, 'I Like the Beach



Boys!' As Edwin Pouncey has observed, this pop-music component would soon fall by the wayside unfortunately. As to the edits - it doesn't take much deductive reasoning to figure out that producer Uwe Nettelbeck was as much a member of the band as the musicians. He was their Doctor - he knew when to to undo the straitjacket, and when to lock them in the rubber room. The selection of musical fragments and their juxtaposition - just like 'painting on recording tape' as Holger Czukay speaks of on *On the Way to the Peak of Normal*. Clearly, this chaotic form of control is what we lacked on *The Faust Concerts*. Some form of structure - no matter how eccentric - is needed to give their lunacy real meaning. Otherwise they tend to wander off to a far corner of the asylum and assume a catatonic position.

Then again, compare their altruistic and outgoing work with Slapp Happy in the 1970s. Not everyone seems clued up on the fact that Slapp Happy and Faust worked together. The former made a very jolly eponymous LP released on the Virgin label in 1974 (V 2014), a crisply recorded collection of eccentric and wonderful songs played by Anthony Moore and Peter Blegvad, and sung by Dagmar Krause. The same songs however, had previously been recorded in Germany in a 1973 session where the bassist, drummer and sax player of Faust joined in, and Uwe Nettelbeck produced. (I don't have the full story on why the Virgin label wanted a different version. I note

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that Jean-Hervé Peron's bass parts appear to survive on the Virgin record.) These sessions surfaced as an LP called *Acnalbasac Noom*, credited to Slapp Happy or Slapphappy, released in 1980 by Recommended Records as RRA 5. Sensible listeners and fans alike prefer the Faust version, which is somehow looser and weirder; you notice it in the way the performances of the other players are affected by the Germans, as if Faust's very presence in the studio releases these cramped

Englishmen from their shackles, and makes them play even more eccentrically. I believe a CD reissue contains both Virgin and Faust versions, but can't confirm at this time. Fans of Bongwater might be familiar with their version of 'The Drum', on *Too Much Sleep*, Shimmy-Disc (1989).

Faust's latest offering is **RIEN, Table of the Elements, Cr (Chromium) 24, 1996**. It has

been greeted with caution by many listeners, but we at the Sound Projector give it an unequivocal huzzah. Jim O'Rourke was brought in as producer. From a *Wire* interview, I was worried he might be trying to recreate himself as a new Uwe N. Such pointless fetishism and preciousness is not unknown, even in the world of avant-garde rock. In fact, O'Rourke does a great job - he quietly selects and stitches tapes together to produce a compelling listen - although sadly, without any of the heavy duty jarring edits like on the first LP. Nonetheless a real winner. It opens with a 10 second silent track, or is it really silent? It signals to me that we're picking up precisely where the Hamburg concert left off. The spoken phrase 'C'est Rien De Faust' kicks off proceedings (and recurs at the very end, after the spoken credits) before that wonderful organ and drumbeat sound crashes in, simultaneously alarming and joyous, a near-trademark sound making a welcome return. As the abstract murk seeps out of the speakers into your room, a species of 'narrative' event-unfolding comes across to this listener's subconscious mind. Somewhere a man is trudging over an industrial dump and calling for his children. Or

have I dreamed that bit? The sixth Track uses helicopter sounds, overlaid classical music and Keiji Haino on auto-pilot screeching and grunting - it's a fantastic voyage through unknown territory. The whole record speaks in riddles, and the 'blank' package design has taken a leaf out of Keiji Haino's book. A limited vinyl issue costing around £17-18 has been spotted; probably no longer available by the time you read this. The same anonymous package wrapped

round a slab of heavy black plastic.



This anonymity in their sleeve art is remarkable - line up the Faust discography in order on your living room floor, and you have an instant exhibition of conceptual art. It reads like a planned project. It's something to do with peeling away layers, seeing further, seeing more than you're supposed to see. You start with an X-Ray of a Fist on the first LP (Faust = Fist in German, the name's nothing to do with the magician Faust); the entire package

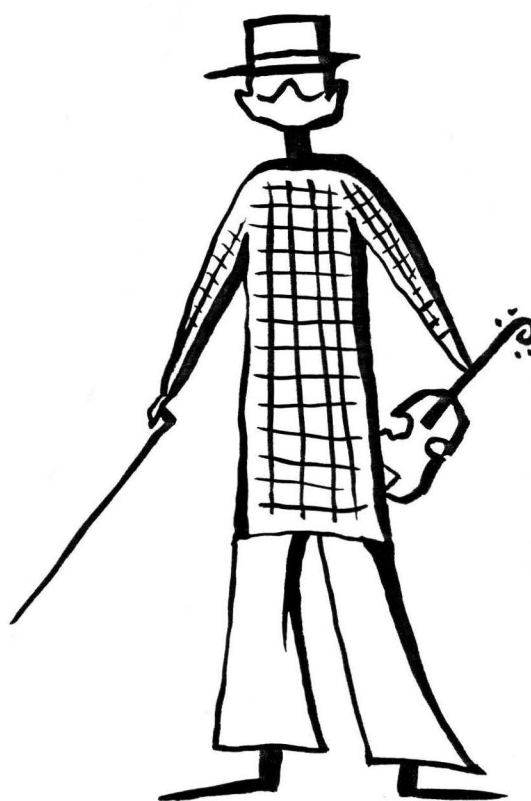
is transparent, as is the vinyl: they see through themselves. And then see beyond that into the dark unknown of *Faust So Far's* black sleeve. Empty staves of sheet music on *Faust IV* suggest a book without words, and alert you to the non-composed, non-arranged, non-performable (non-listenable to some!) nature of their music. Chris Cutler's sleeves for Faust repackagings, such as *Faust Party* or *71 Minutes of*, disrupt the project and bend things his way. He used too much colour - a 'proper' Faust sleeve is monochrome, or just black and white - and 'Germanic' woodcuts suggesting story-book elements which Faust have forsworn. That said, Cutler's painstaking reissue of the first album was a labour of love and a flawless facsimile. The TOE Live packages are more sympathetic, but somehow lack the humour. In this context, the package of *Rien* is not only a return to form, but almost a punchline to the whole cosmic joke. The flat silver bed is a virtual mirror; you see yourself in this music, whatever contribution you add from your inner being. It really is Nothing of Faust.

Pursuant to which:

A Little Tony Conrad in the Night

Table of the Elements have also reissued Tony Conrad and Faust's ***Outside the Dream Syndicate, Li (Lithium) 3*** on CD with an extra track. Those seriously in need of more of this material can try and locate the 7" single that accompanied initial orders. The CD is a beautiful job. You can really feel those violin frequencies filling up the room as the work uncoils before you. The drum and bass pattern is simplistic to the point of nihilism, relentlessly minimalist and barbaric; machines could have played these figures, so to make it work the drummer and bassist have made themselves into anonymous cyborgs, thus they take 'The Side of the Machine'.

Tony Conrad is an important minimalist not dissimilar to Terry Riley or La Monte Young, with whom he has worked (see the American Monsters section). Like these two, and to a certain extent Glenn Branca, his music is based around the harmonics generated by a vibrating string. Thus the physical properties of his violin, and the very precise tuning of the instrument, are fundamental to his entire project. Like Popol Vuh, he too seems in search of the one 'perfect' note and is determined to explore it to infinity.



In 1995 there was a performance of this work at the Queen Elizabeth Hall - Conrad plus some auxiliary violinist deputies, with the Faust drummer and bassist. This concert led to the alienation of a friend from his girlfriend who found the piece incredibly 'neurotic and alarming'. It's true that when the bass player suddenly exploded with rage, threw down his instrument and swung a huge sledgehammer wildly on stage, sparks flew in the air and even I was taken aback. The drummer had been getting progressively more destructive, kicking away the ragged pieces of his ramshackle kit.

The piece had collapsed, and why? It was on a knife edge all the time. Perhaps the just-intonation tuning of the violins had moved slightly off-key. Does Conrad bring emotional crisis wherever he goes? I had enjoyed a 1994 event in London, where he played a most powerful and mesmerising electric drone using only two amplified violins (one played automatically by a rosin wheel). He lurked behind a huge white sheet, a bare bulb positioned so as to throw a 30-foot ghost of Conrad in the air, his elbows dancing a hideous jig of their own as he sawed his bow into the fabric of normality. But he wanted to show his films as well; the video equipment refused to function, Conrad lost his temper, threw his felt trilby to the floor and revenged himself on the audience by reading an interminable pseudo-intellectual tirade that virtually negated any positive work his drones had done.

**Oliver, *Standing Stone*
TENTH PLANET TP 001**

A rediscovered 'lost' record from 1974. The tale of this rarity is well-documented on the sleeve. The original record can barely be said to have existed at all; this is more like a reincarnation than a reissue. Oliver was and is a rural lunatic whom we should all cherish, a masterful musician who, in isolation, found his own way to a demented species of Country Blues and lo-key psych guitar strumming. A basic form of 'pastoral' imagery is lifted from his environment and reshuffled into threatening configurations on these darkly tinged pieces. A unique sound experience. Oliver could have been this island's answer to Captain Beefheart, but since his music has apparently had no influence anywhere, this home-made disc remains a shimmering gem of a warped vision preserved in aspic. A vinyl edition of 500 surfaced in 1992. A CD version with extra tracks has been sighted.

**\$2 Guitar,
The Disappointment
Cassette**

A bunch of sketches snatched from Tim Foljahn's rickety tape player. The opening of side one evokes one of those grainy '50's jazz style documentaries of an American town - the mic's hanging outside the window, traffic's off in the distance, kids run by underneath bawling at each other and you can faintly hear Tim inside, singing and clunking at his organ. Welcome to Hoboken. The rest of the side mashes Mosquito-y instrumentals, bellicose improvised blues, a spazzed-out folky instrumental and scads of drunken lamentation. Low key, wracked and lovely transitory pieces that would have been lost to the ether if not placed here. Side two is Tim's hitherto unrevealed industrial / oppressive side, a treat for

Whitehouse fans but including a sweet nostalgic air with violin for everyone else. All this wrapped in grey and stitched with gold. **(MB)**
From Old Gold, 811 Briarcliff, Apt10,
Atlanta, Georgia 30306, USA
\$3 plus postage



**Various, *Three Fingers
and a Fumb*
BLAST FIRST BFFP 107CD**

A document of musical events which took place at Paul Smith's Disobey Club in 1994. Except it is not a document at all, rather a very eclectic selection from his archive of performances, edited together into two suites. There is no index on either CD, so you have to take it all or nothing - but that's not a bad thing. You recall that *Nothing Short of Total War* was another Paul Smith cut-up job, editorialising music from bands on the Blast First roster; there seems to be a side of him that loves mischief, and that can't let well enough alone. The Disobey events in 1994 were exceptionally good; I'm glad I went to 90% of them. You had to be there I'm afraid, and I'm resigned to the fact that any aural document can only be like a picture postcard from a foreign country. Nonetheless, this does work as an entertaining thing in itself - the edits breath fire into each segment. On first listen I didn't even try and sort out one item from another - result being a

splendid messy rush of unsorted noisy information, downloaded from the Disobey nerve-centre straight to my awaiting workstation. The booklet gives you a visual equivalent of the discs: polaroids or video swipes fed thro the Apple Mac, disrupting readability. A proper survey of the Disobey project has still to be carried out; for the time being, rummage through this little package and you too can wonder why all of London was abuzz with Smith's escapades.

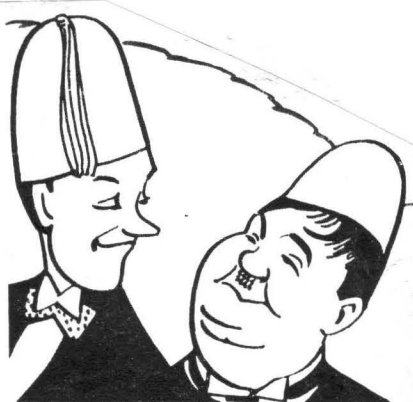
**Vox Humana,
Unsampled
Alligator Discs, ALIG
CD01**

This opens with ex-Family Fodder head honcho Alig Pearce singing like Tracy Chapman, but thankfully that's over and done with quickly. Alig has spent the last few years recording with colourful-sounding

characters like Professor Zoom, Gail Tao and The Fishermen's Friends, as well as some old Family Fodder pals (see accompanying interview) and this is a sampler of the results. Less sophisticated and quirky than the Fodder, and indeed sounding a lot like restaurant music in places, it nevertheless puts an interesting, often psychedelic spin on traditional-style material, as well as providing some nifty modern numbers. And it's a pleasure to hear Alig's great lyrics once more. **(HR)**

**BEAU HUNKS, *Play The
Original Little Rascals
Music*
US, KOCH 3-8702 2**

I'll be forever indebted to Stan and Ollie, for making my afternoons at a boring council job more bearable. The Beau Hunks, formed for Babe Hardy's centenary celebrations in 1992, play music that's familiar to me from those often rewatched videos (I then taped every lunchtime!), not the more famous 'Cuckoo Waltz' theme or songs like



'Honolulu Baby' (those are mostly from the quill of Marvin Hartley) but the stretches of background music that often sounds like it's coming from the room next to where the action is, music that (according to the extensive notes in the accompanying booklet) was originally commissioned as a device to cover the build up of tape hiss between dialogue. Roy Shield was the composer responsible, (though rarely credited) and more than fulfilled his remit. Since the original recordings have long since disappeared, Piet Schreuders of Holland set about the task of bringing recognition to the man's genius, reconstructing and transcribing from fragments in dozens of Hal Roach shorts - not just Laurel and Hardy but the (less familiar to UK audiences) Little Rascals and Charley Chase, Schreuders then putting together an array of talents and, using 1930's recording techniques, creating facsimile recordings that capture the originals' spirit to a T. 'Dash & Dot' is instantly recognisable from several Laurel and Hardy shorts and sounds exactly like you remember it from the films. It's gentler than Raymond Scott or Carl Stalling but the way short themes (a laughing oompah, all-purpose Arabian mood music) and descriptive snippets were cut together in the Hal Roach films would seem to be a precursor of both these later men's work. From 'Flivver Flops' to 'Powerhouse' isn't as much of a leap as from the trilling and crashing ivories of the silents accompaniment Shield was replacing. So here you have it, 50 tracks of heel kicking, dust raising

jauntiness that create a dangerous nothing-could-possibly-go-wrong vibe using anything from big orchestrations to demented piano and xylophone duels to dixieland. Most of the tracks are around a minute in length and fairly circular, not 'progressing' musically but creating a space for Stan Laurel or Spanky or whoever to milk their jokes. A Shield Suspense Medley runs together a series of descriptive passages to make a six minute plus suite of sneaking, running, sliding, yearning and acting 'miserly' that runs the gamut of human emotions.

(MB)

Swans, *The Great Annihilator* YOUNG GOD CD 009

This one taught me a sharp lesson - don't neglect the Swans! Having been assaulted by 'Filth' and 'Cop' when issued c. 1985, I simply ignored subsequent releases. What an astonishing development this was - in only ten years too! All the primal urgency is still there, only expanded into a tapestry of textures and tastes. On 'Mind/Body/Light/Sound' a lo-fi guitar intro gives way to a symphonic barrage of quintuple tracked guitars, while the low-frequency vocal struggles through the murk; while 'Warm' at 4.52 has grown into a delicious melody and a trance worthy of Popol Vuh. Once content merely to slow down all his master tapes to the pace of a chloroformed seaslug swimming in an ocean of glue, Gira now opens up many hidden side-doors and backdrops in his studio space. The early records are a dark room filled with sweaty bodies and maggots. Now he's let more light and space in, but it's done theatrically, like he's building his version of a great Cathedral with stained glass lights, weird statues, and odd colonnaded passageways. Likewise the flat-out brutality and repulsion of the early lyrical content has given way to something far more ambiguous, and much more disturbing. There is a craving for empathy, a healing for their loneliness and pain.

Dymaxion, *Aha, Sissy Arsonist 7" EP* UK Hemiola HEM13

An excellent quarter of whammy-bar-on-a-sampler tunes, looping riffs and drones and beats, something like a less academic, less quirky David Shea. Novack and Newell have achieved a natural unforced sound, lots of weirdness jumping in and out of the mix but not so the tracks are overladen. It's sloppy, sodden, funny and rockin', 'Ant'Ird Ally' with it's car skids and timebomb ticks has a great espionage drama feel.

(MB)



Jarboe, *Sacrificial Cake* YGCD8 RTD 381 0700 2

Two of these 'Swans Related Products' came out at the same time, Michael Gira's being a bit turgid. Jarboe however turned in a supernatural masterpiece. The woman's a white witch brewing an intoxicating hemlock. Grimm's Fairy Tales have been refitted for

the urban 21st century, imbued with ultra-dark undercurrents of child abuse, sexual violence, and sheer metaphysical terror. One for your Halloween Party, if you want all the Jack-O-Lanterns to get up and dance and send your guests riding home in a black Hearse inside a velvet-lined coffin. The beautiful packaging shows Jarboe chooses her images carefully: there's an astonishing painting by Edinburgh artist Deryk Thomas on the cover, and a photographic concoction suggesting a Hanged Man/fertility rite.



**Yma Sumac, Live in Concert 1961: The Russian Tour
ELECT CD 2116**

The high drama of Yma's operatic squawks blasts out again, this time sadly minus the lush studio-enhanced sounds of a full orchestra (a big attraction of the original records) but showcasing her voice, particularly on tracks with Spanish guitar accompaniment only. A live recording it says here, though devoid of atmosphere, even where you can hear the applause - perhaps dubbed in later. What it lacks in warmth, it makes up for in weirdness; not only the oddly muted sound, but the circumstances of its origins. I mean, a command performance from Nikita Krushchev?! It staggers the imagination. The liner notes are translations of the contemporary Russian press reviews, all propaganda and no

hard historical information, though the story of the military heroes so moved by Yma's singing as to tearfully hand her their medals is a classic yarn - makes a change from women fans hurling their knickers. A 'new' product from my beloved Yma as far as I can tell - I don't know of its prior existence on vinyl.

**K. McCarty, Dead Dog's Eyeball - songs of Daniel Johnston CD
A Tribute to Daniel Johnston Volume 3 7" Germany, Little Teddy LiTe718**

A full CD of fashionably Joni Mitchell-ish renditions of Daniel Johnston songs might seem pointless, most people I've played this to think so. But I like it and I'm not even much of a fan of Joni and her ever expanding line of disciplettes. Kathy McCarthy takes the elements of Daniel's originals: the piano; clunky guitar and idiosyncratic pauses; uses them as blueprints and builds the songs up from the bottom, transposing to a full band sound and milling it all through a fetching preppy peppiness. 'Desperate Man Blues' frinstance transfers gracefully from Daniel moaning over a scratchy gramophone record to a fullsome lush arrangement with doo wop backing vocals and Nelson Riddlerly. Bedlam Rovers try to turn the same trick on the 3rd volume of 7" tribute discs but it doesn't work for them. Kitchen Cynics succeeds with a nice Residents-y 'I Am A Baby' and Jad Fair wrestles 'King Kong' into submission aided by Gilles Reider's gargantuan poundings and Tim Foljahn wringing gremlins from his pick-up coils. (MB)

The Dramatics, This Is International Telecom US Megaphone LTD 008

Film-maker Martha Colburn puts down her camera, runs into Jason Willet's Megaphone studios, turns

the tape recorder on, shouts "Go!", they both pick up instruments, flail away for a few minutes, roll the tape back, start it up again, grab more instruments, overdub and repeat the process till they can add no more. Then they invite guests to ice the cake. The results are these ten uncontainable exuberant slabs of noise with an instantly recognisable squelchy compressed energy. Disregarding standard sequencing conventions they leave the best track for the finale - 'Club Leaf Foot Hopper' has Eye Yamatsuka blubbering across the telephone and some back and forth between the late Wally the Duck and saxophonist John Dierker whose breezy riffing matches his contribution to 'Smiling Thru', the highpoint of the Jason Willet, Jad Fair and Gilles Reider CD Megaphone issued a year or two back. There's a domestic vinyl version of this record on Lissy's but it's worth picking up the CD for Martha's individually crafted packaging - photo's film strips, xerox, bacofol, paint, cellophane wrap... (MB)



Hanna Barbera Classics Volume 1 CD US Rhino R2 71887

The start and end titles of early Hanna Barbera cartoons - Ruff and Reddy, Huckleberry Hound, etc. come thick and fast, the first fourteen tracks crammed into just six minutes and it's enough to make the most simple minded cartoon nut feel nauseous - all those chirrupy melodies and the well scrubbed matronly and patronly vocalists who come on like primsters from some well meaning but deranged childrens' protection league. Then comes the background music for

THE DISCURATOR'S DEN

Quickdraw McDraw and the real magic of those limited animation classics comes through. These pieces are long and continuous like the Flintstones' living room and the Quickdraw McGraw suite flits between two of them - a clip clop lazy wild west theme and a rich clarinets, plucked strings and harp fantasia. Nice to hear 'em dragged out from underneath the dialogue and sound effects. Here too are underscores

for Augie Doggie, Snoop and Blabber, Loopy de Loop, Yogi Bear, Magilla Gorilla and the real gem of the collection - Hoyt Curtin's suite of 'Flintstones Jazz' - a swinging rework of the show's theme, a portion of cocktail mellowness and a cool Mancini gumshoe pastiche. And if you left *Mean Streets* still not knowing "What's A Mook?" then the answer's here - he's the guy who wrote 'Scooby Doo, Where Are You?'. (MB)

**John Oswald,
Grayfolded
SWELL/ARTIFACT S/A
1969-1996
Part one of two: Transitive
Axis**

In which Oswald applies his system of Plunderphonics to the music of the Grateful Dead. Oswald appeared at Disobey in 1994 and came over as a rather arrogant and humourless fellow - was shouted off-stage, then

proceeded to play some amazing music. He comes ready with a complete arsenal of pseudo-intellectual, banal arguments to justify his sampling and editing antics; he believes that the system of classical notation is exhausted, all possible variants of notes in an octave have been explored, composition is dead, so cut-ups of existing music is the only possible way forward. His first

hundred versions of 'Dark Star'. The time-travel aspect is played up in the sleeve notes - you hear a 1969 guitar solo simultaneously with one from 1988, for example; it sounds great on paper, but you barely notice it when you're listening. Transitive Axis doesn't freak you or disturb you the way Oswald's other work has done, where he simply gives you too much to listen to and your brain

implodes from overload. On the other hand, if you like the Dead (as I do) then prepare for an hour of bliss. The CD's also indexed with 9 reference points if you wish to skip ahead, to Phil Lesh's section for example, where the tune breaks down into a lovely succession of long bass tones. (These 9 sections are given fancy titles by Oswald,



demonstration at Disobey was edits of hours of John Zorn compressed into a few seconds; 'Why is that better than the real thing?' somebody in the audience asked. I can't even remember Oswald's answer, so little impression did it leave. The question remains unsolved with *Grayfolded*; why is it better than the Grateful Dead? It isn't; the Grateful Dead make this a great record, Oswald's minimalist interventions serve only to gild the lily. Surely it's more interesting to work with potentially inert and unemotional sources (which Oswald has done in the past, to be fair) rather than the rich and beautiful tapestry of these several

similar to La Monte Young and his named chords on *The Well-Tuned Piano*.) Lesh allowed Oswald access to the Dead private archive of soundboard tapes; the former, of course, has been an enthusiastic supporter and avid scholar of 20th century avant-garde music for most of his career, and continues to put his money where his mouth is through the Rex Foundation. Part Two of this project is called *Mirror Ashes* and at time of writing was only available if you buy Part One again, which I haven't.

**Loren Mazza Cane
Connors / Thurston
Moore Split 7"
US Road Cone RoCO 010-in2**

Two sides of guitar instrumentals. Connors' 'Dierdre of the Sorrows' parts 1-4 consists of three unresolved warm ups and a chillingly beautiful and unhysterical adaptation of 'How Great Thou Art'. Moore's 'Just Tell Her That I Really Like Her' treads a measured rough hewn non-rock path to the rock of ages, everything kept very simple, loose and light, comfortable as a Jimmy Reed blues. (MB)

**Robert Fripp,
1999:
Soundscapes
- Live in
Argentina
DISCIPLINE
DGM 9402 2**

Even my King Crimson fanatic acquaintance couldn't stomach this one, which actually shows how good it is. 100% improvised guitar work, building slowly from inaudible noodling to ear-shattering blasts of richness. This is all you could ever ask of a former UK proggy - open-ended, evocative, landscape-painting music. One of the problems with King Crimson (and Genesis, for that matter) was they felt the need for big clumsy meaningful songs to please the stadium crowd - mixing in the abstract arty stuff disguised as 'solos'. Fripp gives it to us raw and uncut. This disc is as haunting as 'Through Hollow Lands' on Eno's *Before and After Science*. You recall Fripp's long-standing association with Brian Eno; the former learned from Eno the technique of deploying two Revox tape machines to produce the early Frippertonics of *No*

Pussyfootin (1972). For his soundscaping hi-jinks these days, Fripp uses better tape decks and a guitar synth - also a Korg, a digi-pedal, and midi technology. Unlike Eno, Fripp clearly thinks this form of 'generative music' should still be played by human hands, and shows clearly he is master of the technology - not the other way around. Listen, and you can hear the music has his signature all over it - those odd dischords, notes that don't quite match - this could only be Robert Fripp, an English oddity whom we should

/ night lights. Sounds beautiful, doesn't it? So slam on this CD and enjoy an avant-garde movie for your ears. I find it a genuinely relaxing sound (and I can't stand motorbikes!); I heard of a music student taking her driving lessons, who knew when to change gear at the moment the pitch of the engine shifted up to F sharp. She would surely love this record, proving there can be music in all sounds; it is a ready-made drone album. Marcel Duchamp's spirit lives on. The titles are dada-inspired too - each track a numbered 'Chant' (the

'Chant Deuxieme' being my favourite for when the engine cuts out and you hear the sound of the wind cutting across the windshield). And check out the Andre Bretonesque descriptions - the caption to track 5 translates as 'An American bitch wounded by a Catalan Dog filled up with melancholy spermatozoa'. Verily, other primal sex and death references are there in the sleeve art and package, a skull at the centre spindle framed by



cherish and not cast aside.

**Vagina Dentata Organ,
Un Chien Catalan
WSNS 1994 001 CD**

Jordi Vallis made this absurd and brilliant recording, consisting of the sounds produced by his motorbike engine and presumably recorded on assorted 'real-time' expeditions on this vehicle. Thus, environmental extra noise is also picked up. Imagine a fixed POV camera mounted onto a bike's windshield and producing unvarying documentary footage of the road, or the weather / rain / sky

'Death Or Glory' in chintzy gothic type, and the gatefold reveals microscopic photos of nude torsos and the underlined phrase UN CADAVERE in full caps. These might connect to Vallis' other releases, which I believe include records of a couple having sex, and a dying man's final gasps. I suspect people think records like this are just nasty jokes, but a bold, absurdist mentality is required - it takes some commitment to go as far as getting a CD like this put together, anyone else would lose their nerve at the last minute. Surrealism in the marketplace - it can be done!

You'll have noticed many PSF Records in this section. PSF stands for 'Poor Strong Factory', the mysterious record label in Japan that issues these monstrous records. It also stands for Poverty-Stricken Fool, which is what you'll be after you've paid for all these absurdly expensive items, some of which cost over £20 apiece. Note however that there are a few domestic-ish or US releases which are also worth checking out - and they're more affordable. In particular look for those on the French label Disques de l'Acier et Du Soleil. I have dwelt at length on some volumes of Tokyo Flashback, which were a revelation to this listener; four volumes of this excellent series have surfaced so far, all of which I would recommend without hesitation. The smart ones amongst you will have already bought Cosmic Kurushi Monsters, the Virgin (budget-ish) 2 x CD sampler, which we will examine next ish.

Tokyo Flashback, PSF Psychedelic Sampler PSFD-12, 1991

Marble Sheep and the Run-Down Sun's Children fade in with a hammering boxing glove, and throughout the long piece one single chord/note unites these six Orientals. Playing the 'Octopus Hold Guitar' links them to Musica Transonic and their mad east-west innovative names for instruments, in the tradition of Blue Oyster Cult's 'Stun Guitar'. The photo here also shows the 'Camel Clutch Lightshow' in action. High-Rise's 'Mainliner' is a high-octane dragster mesa-boogie on acid cut with Jack Daniels. Once again, no stupid verse-chorus structure to disrupt proceedings - just 100% thrills every second. Up next are Ghost playing their 'Improvised Tama Yara' at rained castle. A cello moans, a banjo acts as a koto, a vocalist whines, the drums march you thro' the ruins and Mu Krsna plays 'Atmosphere'. Climb inside this raincloud in a pink sky. The incredible Fushitsusha are caught in the very thick of exorcising a particularly nasty Green Dragon demon, belching out of the victim's guts in thick bursts of vomit, the guitar saws off his limbs while the frantic Holyman

pounds his head with a hammer. White Heaven play an alternative take of 'Blind Promise' - see below for full review. On Verzerk's 'Heavy', N. Yoshimoto's bass rules the roost and the first Black Sabbath LP is invoked with a lumbering, heavy jet-black rhythm. Track 7 has no English translation, but the girl bass-player singer suggests something in the Slits-Raincoats mode - disjunctive, stop-start, structure all pulled to pieces. The keening voice could make this a political protest of a vengeful love song. The last cut is the sound of Keiji Haino's solo vox, being tortured to death in a deep-freeze chamber. Release him somebody, he's the prisoner in the basement

of this monstrous High-Rise Tokyo skyscraper, eroding its foundations from beneath, while Fushitsusha are the earthquake shaking it down, and Verzerk are the bulldozer sweeping away the rubble, whereas...

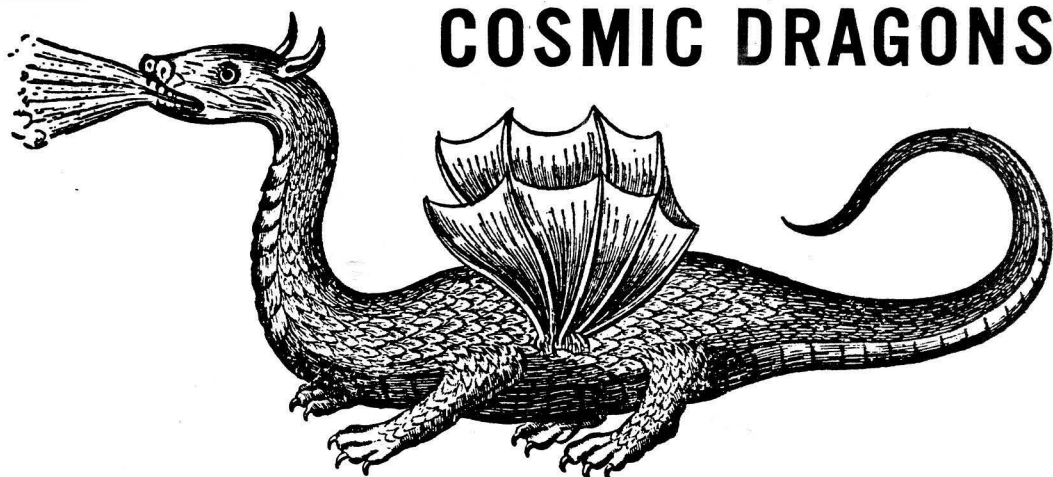
Tokyo Flashback Vol 2 PSFD-24

...this sampler conversely is the fragile Bamboo House of Secrets in the mysterious forest of spirits. Who knows what you will find lurking behind the next door - a beautiful courtesan or a hideous dragon? Overhang Party deliver a hypnotic stone groove wrenched from the psychedelic basement, as good as any genuine period artefact. Marble Sheep's 'I Just Stay in the Up Side' is more sundrenched poppy psych with a distort lead guitar that Jerry Garcia would be proud of; the same goes

for the cut by Ohkami No Jikan, which practically turns into a mid-section from 'Dark Star' as it describes a neon-lit Osaka wasteland at 3 am. On the less conventional side, check out Maher Shala Has Baz, who kick off with 90 seconds of insufferable, disjointed plunkings over which they chant unintelligible wailings; this precedes a crisply recorded, but detuned garage-band song with a nice melody hiding somewhere in the skeletal framework; this is as deliciously off-kiltre as 'Loose Lip Synch Ship' by The Hogs. Kousoyuka are suffering a moment of deep personal crisis on their track, as evinced by the reedy ululating



voice, paranoid lead guitar, and grinding Swans-like rhythm section. Yura Yura Kingdom are the Vertigo band that never were, a swirling sinister noise fronted by a singer who learned how to sing Jim Morrison by the phonetic method. Plus a classic live High-Rise cut, where Narita's octopus screech guitarings are joined by Keiji Haino's gruff barks over the 'Psychotic Reaction' riff. White Heaven and Fushitsusha are also here. Fantastic cover art echoes that of UK garage band The Eyes Blink LP; the back cover is a galaxy photograph in silver and purple.



COSMIC DRAGONS

Tokyo Flashback Vol 4 PSFD-69

Another strong collection with a few big names, some intriguing unknowns and several distinct divisions of 'psychedelia' at work. High-Rise are the riff kings of the 90s and they pull it out of the bag here, even when they're not as sharply recorded as we're used to hearing them. Asahito Nanjo's other band Musica Transonic don't let us down either, and in the land of the riff Puka Puka Brains look to be ascending stars. Construction, a very young-looking band, use a coupla familiar riffs - 'The Gift' and 'Sister Ray' and make diverting enough use of them and some acknowledgment in the lyrics - 'this...reminds me of the songs of someone'. A second strain comes from Psychedelic Crazy Horse and Akiyama Sugimoto - burlesque style drumming and noodly warm-up exercises from the guitarists, each going their own way and taking no heed of the other musicians, I half expected the tap of a baton and a big dramatic convergence. But it didn't come. Either time. The third strain is of a spookiness I'd associate more with Chinese ghost films. The Hikyo String Quintet have it and so do On-na Kadomo - a line-up of two bass guitars and a violin that's either heavily processed or has nickle wound strings bowed with a hacksaw. There's much creaking and clanking behind the plaintive

vocals, to good effect. But the rosette winner of this spooky strain and of the whole compilation has to be Shizuka - electric mandolins, extreme reverberation and a lament that blossoms to startlingly expansive proportions. At which point you should tape down the crockery and cover your head with your elbows. (MB)

GHOST: *Ghost*, STRANGE WAYS WAY 72

***Temple Stone*, WAY 78 *Second Time Around*, PSF-D25**

Ghost are the true inheritors of the progressive folky mantle; if High-Rise are the Japanese Black Sabbath, Ghost are the Incredible String Band. Electric instruments vie with traditional bamboo reeds and percussion, and combine with eerie moans to conjure up a most haunting atmosphere. There's a photograph of the band (in booklet for PSF-D 12) playing or posing in the ruins of an ancient Japanese Castle - either paying homage to The Can's *Monster Movie* (Made in A Castle with Better Equipment) or giving due respect to their honourable ancestors. The eponymous CD *Ghost* features many long-winded anthems to the 'Moungod' - a god of the Mountain, or a god of the Moon? When they get into a groove - and in this department they score more often than not - these fellows can put

you in a deep trance for days. In adopting western modes of musical expression, cultural differences are not elided - instead, an exciting East-West clash results. But you could say that about all the fine records in this section.

M C Hellshit and D J Carhouse, *Live at*

***Disobey* BLAST FIRST BFFP 126CD**

Otomo and Eye let rip during one night at a gathering round the Disobey bonfire. At first listening, this scared the bejabbers out of me and an electro-magnetic pulse caused my pacemaker to implode. Now I'm back from intensive care and slowly growing accustomed to the antics of shock-jock Eye and turntabling-terrorist Otomo. In their eighth-dimensional world of fantastic possibilities, Frank Sinatra was a crippled reggae singer who sang back-up in Lesley Gore's band while hammering on a packing case filled with vampire bats. If he failed in his duties, the devil's minions would boil him in oil and prod him with jade pitchforks. The results of these diabolic tortures have been taped and issued herein for your enjoyment - you sadists! Very very limited 3-inch CD, beautiful collage/fibre tip scrawl sleeve. Probably long out of print now, so really your only option is to kill someone to get a copy.

White Heaven, Out
PSF-D 48

Their first record in 1991 was a limited 500 copies on vinyl, sold out in no time and is a collector's item, hence this slightly easier to obtain CD reissue of it. To some impatient listeners this may not have the same immediate drool-factor as the other goodies reviewed here, but I think you should stay with it as it's a real grower. Songs, for a start, not just noise - and guitar grooves of the more mellow mode, both of which make this a tribute to the past glories of psych & garage, a kaleidoscope of the band's record collections. The clanky rhythm guitar on 'Blind Promise' is worthy of anything from the *Pebbles* series - nearly the equal of the unbearably beautiful sound of the chundering rhythm of 'Love At Psychedelic Velocity' - while the lead guitar is distorted to the pitch of Captain Beefheart's blues harp. The sweet guitar solo on 'Dull Hands' edges us towards Quicksilver Messenger Service territory, not a bad place to be at all - and conjures up Roky Erickson, who would make a real meal out of this lyric which plaintively begs 'Please Don't Walk Away' over a slow rock beat. 'My Cold Dimention' whisks us back to early Black Sabbath territory - a lot of the Jap undergrounders seem to venerate Tony Iommi, and quite correctly. 'Mandrax Town' finally confirms all the druggy clues hinted at in titles and lyrics (it's a real come-down album, this). 'I love you sweet white lines' declares the singer, then at 2.05 a double-tracked one-note guitar solo kicks in as deep as an armful of heroin. 'Out' begins as the riff Lou Reed never got round to playing, somewhere between 'I'll be Your Mirror' and 'Jesus', with tricky major-minor chord changes from 'New Age'. On the front cover, the four members of the band form a virtual Skull in black and gold (respect to the Grateful Dead), while a labyrinth motif on the back cover challenges the listener to find the way 'Out' of



their maze of references and smotheringly overcharged mix. A high-quality item indeed.

High-Rise, Live
PSF-D 48

Yet another intensely LOUD disc that will cause your poor CD Player to wave the white flag, pack its bags and go home to its Mum. High-Rise, like many of these rogues on the PSF roster, have tried the recorded history of Heavy Metal / Prog music, sampled it on full blast and stuck their heads in the bass bins of stadium-sized PA speakers - and they're still not satisfied! So they have to perform their own brand of music to get anywhere near the power surge and energy release that their macro-biotic systems evidently crave. Glenn Branca and his guitar orchestras? Bah! A cigarette lighter trying to compete with the core of the sun. If you can educate your palate to taste a good hot chili through layers of flame, then you should have no trouble untangling the superlative guitar riffs and wah-wah pedal to the floor solos that abound in this brilliant recording.

Musica Transonic,
Musica Transonic,
PSF-D 61

Unrestrained woggles of effects-soaked 'Motor Psyc ho Medieval' guitar, another psychedelic-to-the-Nth degree masterpiece. This trio of demonic spirits was formed out of The Ruins, High-Rise and Toho Sara. Musica have a extra weird dimension in that they sometimes sound like they're trying to be a cabaret-style parody of a 60s beat group. Occasional major-seventh chords work their way in to the mix, likewise the basic repeats in the song 'structures' make you think of a cheesy garage band only too ready to display their rank incompetence by playing Louie Louie at the high-school bop. Less than 40 minutes of concentrated psych vitamins are guaranteed to revitalise your heart, head and lungs. The sheer volume is another all-out attack on your hifi system, your neighbours, your walls and your head - not until a fine hairline crack in your cranium appears will these maniacs rest.

Consumer Guide to Boredoms



Illustration by Eye and Atari
Photographs by Graham Gavin
Special thanks to Tim Gane
and Hidetsugu Ito

By Marc Baines

Editor's Note: I have Marc to thank for a deluge of great Boredoms tapes and helping me to figure out their music which (at first) struck me as nasty, stupid chaos. He said, 'See them live and you'll understand'. My memory of the one live show I saw in London was of a game of Mortal Kombat featuring Librarians in Black Leather vs Half-Naked Tattooed Monsters - a joyous madness of insane logic and wild energies. That show prised open my cranium with forceps and infected me with the Boredoms virus. Who better then to testify to their awesome power than Marc, who has assembled the collection described below at great personal expense, trawled for more data, and now gives us this intensely enthused, personal Consumer Guide and appreciation...

Onanie Bomb meets the Sex Pistols **UK, EARTHNOISE EN001, 1988**

An electronic code, a chime, a swipe at the snare and into a churning loop and chant - 'In a gnat style booby hatch, in a gnat style booby hatch...' Okay, it may be a gross mishearing on my part but it sounds like an apt locator for what is to follow. In the space of 21 seconds Boredoms No-Core has staked its claim on your listening lobes.

This first LP leans heavily on their bedfellows in the 'B' section of the record racks - Black Sabbath, the Birthday Party, Butthole Surfers - and tries to outdo them all. It's by turns confounding, funny, disconcerting and obliteratingly powerful, sometimes offensive (is the title 'Lick'n Cock Boatpeople' non-PC or what?), sometimes frustrating ('Young Assouls' ends with an agonising 90 sec belching contest) but

Boredoms always redeem themselves, putting their absurd production ideas into practice, putting inspiration above studio convention. Compared to later releases *Onanie Bomb* is a straightforward rock/hardcore mix; compared to most straightforward rock records it could be from Venus.

The final three bonus tracks on the CD are from the *Anal by Anal* EP - soul powered boogie from when Boredoms were just a studio bound duo - Tabat (later of Zeni Geva) and Yamatsuka Eye.

Soul Discharge '99 **UK, EARTHNOISE EN002, 1989**

The 'psychoalphadiscobetaudioaquadolop sound' that introduced Boredoms to the West when Shimmy-Disc issued it in '89, probably the best known of their records, it's subsequently been reworked and reissued by Earthnoise, so you don't have to feel you're lining Kramer's pockets to buy it. You may even put some cash the Boredoms' way. The overhaul starts with an additional first track, 'Your Name Is Limitless', hard to describe without sounding like some Vic Reeves patter - 'a hornet in a Robertson's Golden Shred jar suggesting a melody to John Barry at Cozy Powell's rehearsal rooms'. All of which does nothing to prepare you for 'Bubblepop Shot', a flailing ball of hyperfunk; Eye squawking 'weex ah!'; a bellow in the cloisters; Cistercian vocal warm-ups, then into a monstro rock riff, gunshots and enter Yoshimi introducing her operatic divebombing vocals. If

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anything could be classed as the definitive Boredoms sound perhaps this is it.

Yoshimi introduces the next track, 'Hello, 52 Boredom!' and it's a B-52s tribute - for about half a minute then they're off into 'Sun, Gun, Run' and some sloganeering about 'peace in the village!' They're going wild, they're all over the shop but at the same time very disciplined and precise. I've read live reviews in the weekly papers dismissing Boredoms as a barrage of formless making-it-up-as-they-go-along noise, but it's idiotic to imagine music so focused is just jammed out on the spot. Those writers show themselves up for the witless fashion correspondents they are.

'Z&U&T&A' starts with a dog in the garden of the gods / Martin Denny scenario then progresses through guitar freak out and yelping to stomping spacefunk. Just as you expect the big Black Sabbath guitar riff and ponderous drum thud of 'Pow Wow Now' to build to a crescendo things get squelchy and Eye scats 'boo bah bey boo bah bey...' On paper this may sound like comedy rock for stoners but that's nowhere near the mark. It's unshackled music, confounding expectations, picking up on whatever aspects of pop culture they want to throw in the pan and doing it aggressively and seriously. It's also refreshing to see them set themselves apart from a lot of their noise and hardcore contemporaries by not entitling their songs with pat death / nazi / visceral / satanic imagery and pretending to have a deeper agenda, but rather producing music with intensity that's overwhelmingly positive and doesn't rely on those clichés.

Bossadelic? Novadelic? Indisputably.

Pop Tatari

US, REPRISE 9 45416-2, 1992

'Hey Bore Hey' - Boredoms go grunge, 'cept they're too fucked to grunge, the riffing breaks up and breaks up and finally breaks down. 'Bo Go' finds them more at home with a nightmarish Jet Harris riff. 'Telehorse Uma' takes the Fire Engines' 'Dischord' underwater, matches it up with a disgruntled Gregorian drone then breaks in with a celebratory 'Maker Maker!'. This is a record full of little thefts, appropriations and transformations. 'Heeba' takes the melody of Davenport and Cooley's 'Fever', mangles it through a cute robotic voice modulator, adds fingersnaps and Hira's beautiful drifting basslines.

'Bod' has some dumbo trying to figure out who they are - 'Four Tops?'... 'No.'... 'Motorbosom?'... 'No.'... 'Son of a Chippy?'... 'Nooooo'... Finally he gets it - 'Boredoms?'... 'Yayss! And... good... noise!', and Boredoms blast out an earful to prove it. It strikes me that there's the same positive energy, grandeur of ideas, hugeness in execution and hairbend twists and thrills that 60s and 70s Jack Kirby comics give you - that epic planet-swallowing, primitive unleashing of possibilities. And there's more great riffs on one track



like 'Okinawa Rasta Beef' than on the whole of that last Screaming Trees record. It's clear this is a bigger, sharper more melody-filled disc than the last two.

'Cheeba' is jawdropping pop funk that would be chart material in '96 if pop had run on the right tracks and every major city had a monorail. Definitely one to stick on when you're preparing for a night on the tiles...

WOW 2

JAPAN, AVANT AVAN 026, 1993

Subtitled '*Life is OK!*' Produced at Martin Bisi's studio with John Zorn. From where I'm sitting this is one of the greatest records EVER. No question. It's Boredoms' most accessible record too and fully bears out their assertion that they're a pop group not a noise outfit. It's probably the record that's most like their live shows too.

Kicking out with 'Domsbore', surge from the begin, a huge all-enveloping riff. 'Jet Net' follows, the melody riding on Yoshimi's trumpet, snatched by Yamamoto's guitar and rode all the way up. 'Pop Can' plays the twin drummer rumble to full effect, topped with a Sly Stone 'Chakka-lakka-lakka'. 'Rydeen' shows them to be masters of the unexpected, just when you think they're going to explode into action they drift into a long long meditative / amble section THEN explode into action.

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'Heps' they've played the three times I've got to see them live - a murderously insistent melody line, Yamamoto shines, Yoshikawa and Eye chant 'I Could see My Heart in a key-po key-po' and you almost believe you could too.

'100 Dom' has a spooky ambience - the writhing of souls in torment. Boredoms could produce a great film score except they demand too much attention. It's almost impossible to use Boredoms records as background music for any activity - reading, writing, even drawing, they've got this knack of stopping your brain. Dead.

It is surprising though that Boredoms have never made videos, considering how visual their stage shows are. Yoshiwaka and Eye facing off against each other with martial arts moves and mock ritualistic posturing. I asked Yoshiwaka after their Glasgow show last year if he likes martial arts films, he pawed the air 'I like...I like...' then grabbed a jacket and pointed to a patch - 'Yin Yang?!' - 'No No No' and pointed closer and there was a little praying mantis - 'Praying mantis?', 'Yes, yes, praying mantis!'

'Up' closes the record with great crackling sheets and snarls of guitar, perhaps a tip of the hat to Keiji Haino.

Super Roots

USA, REPRISE 9 41559-2, 1993

A 16 minute EP that's turned up reasonably cheaply over here - studio doodles and digressions that don't reflect their live shows. The first in a projected series of 10 *Super Roots*. 'We go to the studio' says Eye, discuss what we will do and have fun realising on the spot what we have thought of, jokes and so on, normal songs making...'

'Pop Kiss' is runs of descending guitar notes and kissy noises. '4' is a medley of 'good noise' including 'Machine 3' - a huge rhythm generating and the band screaming 'Machine' at the top of their lungs, and '96 Teenage Bondage', Yoshimi's tribute to early Pussy Galore, that's like all their best moves condensed into two minutes. 'Ear?Wig?Web??' I dunno, a lot of the fun with these songs is no matter how many times you hear them you can't quite fathom them out.

Chocolate Synthesizer

JAPAN, WEA WPC 2 7508, 1994

A patch design on the cover proclaims 'KUNG FUsion' and littered inside are lots of screwy little doodles and collages and photos of band members in preposterous clothing like some latterday Dada pamphlet.

'Acid Police' is thankfully free of housebeats but builds around a call and response - 'Aceeee!' - 'Pol-Lee-Shay!', after a few goes round the guitar chimes in, eventually Yoshimi and Atari thunder in on tomtoms and just when you think they couldn't get no

higher - Bang! Zoom! 'Synthesizer Guidebook on Fire' is a trancey dreamy dub of 'Acid Police' with gongs and tablas and phasing and big dub bass.

'Anarchy in the UKK' is built on a corny-corny metal riff but mutates into something stranger, almost Dixieland in parts but with that big double drummer throb, ending with a 'good game, good game, good game' repeat like a broken-down Bruce Forsythe simulacrum...

'B for Boredoms' has a sped-up computer processed sound, like a lot of the last three or four Butthole Surfers records, but they pull it off much better than their Texas cousins, it's still a crazy all over the place sound. 'Eedoms' is their Osaka Nocturne - a sleazy noir harmon muted trumpet, saved from the cool by interfering guitar mayhem and a rowdy pack of midgets. It'd make the perfect theme for a 90s 'Get Smart', just as 'I'm Not Synthesizer (YPY)' would be a great metal theme for World Spittoon Championships.

'5 Moke 7' is brilliantly structured by some insane logic. Boredoms cram so much into one song but there's no sense that they're trying to impress with flashy technique, wacky contrast contrivances and clever signature changes like some of the drearier 80s European collective type groups. *Chocolate Synthesizer* is the last record they made with Yoshikawa, second vocalist, mini-drum kit drummer and Eye's foil, also the last rock album style album to date.

Super Roots 2

JAPAN, WEA 3CS-2011, 1994

A 3-inch, 6½ minute collection - cute as a button and not much bigger; included with initial Japanese copies of *Chocolate Synthesizer*, I was going to say 'free with' but I paid £30 for the special edition *Choc Synth*, so free it weren't.

More spontaneous unrehearsed confections, minute-long snatches - 'Go Come Oparks' is a cowbell and tomtom rhythmfest, 'Magic Milk' uses dropping a pencil and popping a pop can for percussion. 'Noise Ramones' is a series of overlapped tones and frequencies, a reprise from *Pop Tatari*.

Super Roots 2 is slight but it's a nice item. I especially like the slip sleeve with waxy bandage-like / medical-feel inner bag.

Super Roots 3

JAPAN, WEA WPC2-7513, 1994

A single track - 'Hard Trance Anarchy Way (Karaoke of Cosmos)' for the aspiring Eye to wail and squawk over. A mess of galloping guitars and battering drums that keeps up its intense energy level for over half an hour, changing key about every five minutes and only after laying on plenty of teasing drum climaxes. An adrenal rush of joy of the kind I imagine motorcyclists

feel on a long clear trap-free road. It's sometimes hard to know if you're hearing organ and guitar tunes seeping in and out of the mix or if it's overtones and sustain playing messing with your mind.

Super Roots 4

[Unissued]

Super Roots 5

JAPAN, WEA WPC2-7518, 1995

I've had four hours sleep and I NEED eight a night. I heard the mail plop through the front door and the cat was whining so I got up, put some food in the cat's bowl and opened this package containing a tape of *Super Roots 5*, put the tape on and went back to bed. Barely half awake, lulled for the first few minutes of pastoral calm, suddenly it feels like the ground has opened up and I'm tipped forward and falling at speed down an endless borehole, through warm rushes of air and heading right for the Earth's core. Before I know it I'm spat out into daylight and soaring upwards through the clouds with an incredible feeling of well being. And all the time I'm there in my bed.

Later on I find out the Boredoms had recorded the record lying on the floor of the studio in near darkness with their eyes shut.



Super Roots 5 is one hour-long piece, 'Go!!!!' 'It was like a marathon high,' says Yoshimi in an interview for *Alles* internet magazine, 'Not at all tiresome...' She plays just one cymbal throughout. Eye, as always, produces. 'I am mic-er,' he says, 'Put \$1 toy microphones and the pin microphones everywhere such as headphone. They all have their own frequency bands so mix them together and they make a different kind of harmony...it's hardcore New Age.' A fantastic extension of their positive energy approach and the perfect gift for the bedridden. An incredible record.

Super Roots 6

JAPAN, WEA WPC2-7519, 1996

Seventeen tracks of solo flibjap from the recently rechristened Yamataka Eye. It's a wonder that WEA continue to issue these improvised non-commercial quickie recordings but long may they continue. Most of these pieces are pretty dry, a few monotonous but more of them inspired pulse-pounders whether funky interplanetary transmissions, a techno-Sandy Nelson percussive storm or moody organ and gong meditations. Eye says 'You can call it Water music'.

Additional Items

A promo LP 2001 has surfaced recently with no label information, just 'promo' stamped on it and titles for the three long tracks. 'Super Go!!!' fills one side, a varispeed drone over Jaki Liebzelt drums - a prototype for *Super Roots 5*? 'Super Future' is a cavernous dub mix of the previous track and 'Super Now', the most insidious of the three has plucked piano strings, clattery and boxy percussion and some similarity to '6' from *Super Roots 6*.

Public Bath Records featured Boredoms along with Hanatarash and Omoide Hatoba on their *Japan Bashing Vol 1* EP, and also issued a 7-inch - 'Michidai' / 'Fuanteidai' extracted from the *Boretronix* cassette series, three volumes of live, studio and sampled collage. 'Pukulee and Rukulee' appears with good songs by Pell Mell and Cupid Car Club on the *Rock Stars Kill* LP.

Eye also appears on releases by UFO or DIE (with Yoshimi), Naked City, Hanatarash, Puzzle Punks, Audio Sports and with Otomo Yoshihide. A 100-CD box set of Eye's tour of China with John Zorn is available mail-order, at \$350 per ste. Yoshimi occasionally drums with Free Kitten, plays guitar and sings with OOIOO and has three solo singles on Ecstatic Peace. Hira plays with Hanadensha, Yamamoto with Omoide Hatoba and Yoshiwaka with Concrete Octopus. What Atari is doing with his spare time I don't know...





THIS IS THIS: Keiji Haino

Keiji Haino is an artist from Japan about whom practically nothing is known. Buy all of his records right now.

A true giant for our times, Keiji Haino (KH) wisely avoids many conventional routes of publicity, and refuses point-blank to play the record company game. Instead he expresses himself 200-percent through his music, and through his very deliberately crafted image. Black is the colour of his soul, and is used at all times: CD sleeves and labels are printed black on black, he only dresses in black leather or cotton, he is never photographed without his jet-black shades. At a live performance I was privileged to see, he insisted on blacking out all the house lights to create as near as possible the ideal environment for his sunless soul to thrive. When the great Patty Waters sung 'Black is the Colour of My True Love's Hair' on her 1966 ESP album (ESP-1025), she was anticipating the rise of Keiji Haino with her extended free-form wails of 'BLAAAAAAAAAACCK!!!'

He is an alien, a leaping black stick insect. This was the impression I took home after the Disobey concert in 1994, from which my head continued to buzz for a full 48 hours. I have never been the same since. His percussion piece (for which the total darkness was required) began to resemble a black magic ritual; his movements were sudden and strange as he leaped from cymbal to cymbal. Absolute silence had been demanded of the audience. We all managed to comply - except for one or two, who considered their trivial blather more important than the astounding rite being performed before us. They were the cause of his sudden termination of the piece and his angry departure - and he had given them warning with a pointed clang from his

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biggest cymbal. I can only apologise for the UK audience - we are misguided philistines!

The guitar piece from that same concert was about the most unbelievable performance I have witnessed. It is surely impossible for a force of this power to be pouring out of one person. It is a ritual purging, the cleansing of unholy elements with a spiritual blast from a water-cannon. It is a celestial radio receiver tuning in to a noise that we have been hearing all our lives. Never until now has anyone dared to give it expression. It is a noise known since the dawn of time, heard by dinosaurs, feared by primitive man, and now brought into a unwilling 20th-century world to confront. KH makes all other music appear to be merely descriptive of experience. If classical music attempts to sing about the grandeur of the mountain, KH is the mountain.

I claim KH as a personal spiritual mentor, his CDs and performances have, for me, served as maps to uncharted regions of the soul. A recent release, in part describing him as a 'Guide-Y Man' seems to confirm this. A spooky rumour once crossed the desk - that KH wears the clothes of his dead mother. He has been playing music since the 1970s, yet appears to be ageless. If you ever seem him live, you will believe he was born in the roaring centre of the Hiroshima blast.

This much is factual: the following CDs are available, all of them of intense interest. As solo records:

***Execration that Accept
to Acknowledge***
FORCED EXPOSURE FE 032
***The Book of "Eternity
Set Aflame"***
FORCED EXPOSURE FE 036

Byron Coley at Forced Exposure has done much to spread the gospel of KH; he published some excellent record reviews in the last issue and I heard that an entire issue devoted to KH was planned. These CDs are put together from some exceptional performances. *Execration* is a 41 minutes continual piece. KH gasps for air in between screeches as he rides the waves of feedback, hanging ten on his 'axe'. *Eternity Set Aflame* is three pieces. The second is the sound of 200 massed bagpipes at the top of a Scottish Cromlech at midnight by the sea. Glissando waves of abstract melodies vie for position, growing increasingly

strange as you pass forward into the centre of this globe of doom. When you arrive the very fabric of your being is warmed by an incandescent ball of energy. On the third track, a characteristically scorching guitar attack, KH's body is his own tape-edit machine, easily changing the direction of the massive sound with each sweep of his mitt. But the first track remains an unbeatable masterpiece here; the foghorn sirens blown through factory chimneys while whirlpools of tidal waves crash around Keiji's feet and he stands invincible, taming the elements. It is simply not possible to play this music on a guitar.

A Challenge To Fate
Disques du Soleil et De L'Acier, CDSA
54029

A personal favourite, chiefly for the contrasting range of unbearable emotions it conjures. 'My Only Friend' should reduce you to tears. What a keening, haunting, plaintive ululation issues from his throat, as he plays a simple guitar figure that has dropped from Heaven. The first, second and third 'Darkness' pieces are terrifying, deep elemental gruntings and screeches, a patient strapped to his mattress suffering foul



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nightmares in the dark. We find here his lyrics and song titles - purest poetry that makes a haiku look cluttered - translated into English, providing a rare hint of some of the content that informs KH's work. Battles with the elements, wrestling with his cursed fate, his doomed friendships. 'Swimming In the Midest of Stalking fate / It Has No Form / It is Not A Joy / Like that.' I also love the stark sleeve note for this item: 'Utilizing no overdubbing. This is this.'

***The 21st Century Hard-Y Guide-Y Man*, PSF D-68**

Another astounding masterpiece. KH is the Emperor of Drone - the endless stream of sound that evokes a taste of eternity. At Disobey, he wailed dorian intervals over a long drone, for which my guess is he used a 'continuum', a rotating rosin wheel on a string, which he fed thro' pedal effects - for me the drone connected him to another Visionary Genius, Abbess Hildegard of Bingen. For *Hard-Y Guide-Y*, KH delivers a network of intense sonic bombardment akin to a bed of needles performing mad acupuncture on your brain to release dark thoughts. That this surgery is realised through these antiquated acoustic instruments defies belief - you realise it in those moments of punctuation when he pauses from grinding the hurdy-gurdy handle. But for the last track, he dares to feed it though his secret arsenal of effects pedals. You will die when you hear this! So make your will first.

And with the trio **Fushitsusha**, in which KH plays guitar with bassist and drummer whose names are not known to me at this time:

***Pathetique*, PSF-D 50**

***Allegorical Misunderstanding*, AVANT AVAN 008**

***The Caution Appears*, Disques du Soleil et De L'Acier, CDSA 54039**

***Purple Trap*, Blast First BFFP 124**

Both *Caution* and *Pathetique* deliver the classic Fushitsusha goods; loud, distorted, colossal exploding improv extended to infinity. You can get an excellent taster of this on the third *Tokyo Flashbacks* sampler. *Caution* has some interesting edits - three short sections of less than a minute each, are slotted in between the longer improvisations. *Allegorical* is on John Zorn's label; the trio in quieter, more reflective and mysterious magic mode. 'Magic I-X' are ten shortish pieces that work to bizarre stop-start, staccato dynamics. *Purple Trap*, also titled 'The Wound that was given birth to must be bigger than the wound that gave birth' is not brilliantly recorded (quite a bit of amp fuzz and background audience chattering), and some of the songs are a bit slow in getting started - but one of the best performances overall. 'Beauty So Great that one can still go insane' is the most intoxicating slow-moving journey up the River Styx - I'm glad that Keiji was playing Charon on this occasion! We have Disobey to thank for this concert, once again - the great UK appearance at Brixton Canterbury Arms (of all places!), where once again an unforgettable image resulted. Having finished a blistering two-hour performance, KH unstrapped his guitar and tried to make his theatrical exit through the fire doors. They were locked. Thwarted, he simply flopped down in the corner with his head to one side - all energy spent, transformed from a flailing maniac into a lifeless china doll.



KRAMER and his fragile whine

by Harley Richardson

**Bongwater, *The Big Sell-Out*
SHIMMY DISC SHIMMY 050**

**Kramer, *The Guilt Trip*
SHIMMY DISC 3 x LP / 2 x CD Box set
SHIMMY 055**

**Daavid Allen and
Kramer, *Who's
Afraid?***

**SHIMMY DISC
SHIMMY 060**
**Hugh Hopper
and Kramer, *A***

***Remark Hugh
Made*
SHIMMY DISC
SHIMMY 076**

Bongwater's remarkable achievements seem to have passed unnoticed by most of the civilised world. Dismissed by many as an arty conceit, their back catalogue now relegated to the £2.99 'Giveaway' section by Selectadisc, they were largely ignored by an indifferent public. But for a few years in the late 80s and early 90s this loose conglomeration of wild musicians with Kramer and Anne Magnuson at its core breathed some desperately needed new life into rock'n'roll.

Breaking No New Ground (Shimmy 02, 1987) and *Dounble Bummer* (Shimmy 011, 1988) developed the use of spoken word, abstract noise and tapes of found material as dynamic tools in rock'n'roll. *Too Much Sleep* (SDE 9017, 1990) took the magical combination of Magnuson's angelic singing voice and Kramer's fragile whine to its height. The parts when Magnuson's voice is faded out for a few seconds to let Kramer's come to the fore still send shivers down my spine.

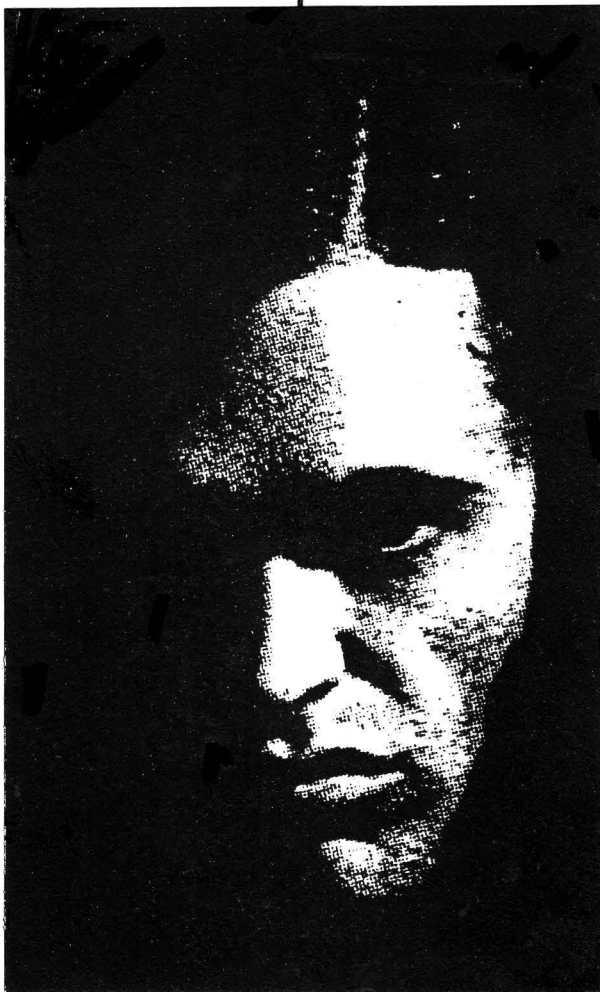
Their 1991 swan song, *The Big Sell Out*, was recorded at Kramer's famous studio Noise New York, by then sounding on its last legs. He had his studio jiggery-pokery down pat and a lot of the techniques

and tricks were now familiar to the listener but what a way to show them off! As usual the band didn't mess around getting to the point. The punchy opening track leads into a beautiful psychedelic ballad. An hour later the record ends with Kramer showing the Beautiful South how a cover should be done ('Everybody's Talking'). In between you've had a gaggle of sophisticated pop/rock songs, with Kramer making use of new lead guitarist, Randolph Hudson III. At one point the lead guitar has so much presence you think it's going to leap out of the speakers and eat you. Todd Rungren and (of all things) *Rio*-period Duran Duran are evident influences and Lennon and

McCartney quality-melodies just seeming to skip out of Kramer's head. This record has more great musical ideas than you can shake a stick at.

Since then, Kramer's output has been divided mainly between solo efforts and collaborations with various musical pals, including his Gong / Soft Machine heroes Daavid Allen and Hugh Hopper. Those hoping that his solo work would be in the vein of 'California' or 'Havana', ie like Bongwater minus Anne Magnuson, were disappointed. *The Guilt Trip* boxed set has a more laid back, indulgent approach to songwriting, with Kramer developing a curious line in stream-of-consciousness confessional lyrics. The tight dynamics were gone but the mix of

songs and abstract noise was pleasant enough (and at six sides there was plenty of it!) and there was a poignant final track with Kramer playing organ over an answerphone message which repeats and breaks down. *The Secret of Comedy* continued in the same vein, only with Kramer wearing his love of fey English psychedelia ever more proudly on his sleeve. His collaborations with the fey English Allen and Hopper were less interesting, being light on the found materials and abstract noise, heavy on the hippy philosophy lyrics and ropery indulgent instrumentals. None of these latter releases could be described as essential, but somehow everything Kramer touches has a little bit special something about it. Don't let the tales of his philandering put you off - get down Selectadisc now!



Hermit Rock

Two shining examples of the benefits of solitude from Rock's great Anchorites

Supreme Dicks, *Workingman's Dick* Freek FRR002 CD, 1994

An unsolicited disc which lurked in the corner pile gathering dust for months. I'd smugly assumed from the band's moniker it'd be some tiresome lo-fi excursion into goonish humour. There it lay until one night it was given a chance and arcane currents of electricity crackled around the house.

How to describe *Workingman's Dick*? The Freek records catalogue offers the unhelpful 'psychedelic folk-pop'. Well, it's certainly low key and home-recorded, probably with a single mic, two cheap treble guitars (one played with Barrettesque glissando), a cavernous tom-tom and sometimes a resonating gong. It's surely half-improvised, the mumbled vocals dredged from unconscious depths.

But home for the Dicks has to be a desert cave into which they were exiled for their heretical mix of primitive Hindu / Gnostic / Orgone mysticism. And their unlearned improvs must be stoked by severe ritual fasting or a cache of bottled ether, with these recordings made at the inspired point between revelation and total black-out.

'Flaming day of the locusts' is menacingly alluring, a looping guitar-scratch motif slowly recedes only to swarm back with triple echo volume. 'Descension Song' has deeply intoned phrases like 'Open visions of crystal mountain paths' and 'Bird feathers blooming in the afternoon heat', pulling off the feat of making you believe it, open-mouthed. 'Ranada's Demon' speaks in disembodied tongues from a humming dung-heap in an abandoned mossy temple.

I swear this album is a true psychedelic hermetic treasure and perhaps the only contemporary sonic

link with those 60s Aquarian cult recordings of Father Yod and Ya Ho Wa. Go and see if you agree. The only problem is I'm not rushing to hear any other Supreme Dicks records (there are three) lest this potent spell be broken. (JB)

Freek, PO Box 3583, London NW3 3RH

Alexander "Skip" Spence, *Oar* Sony Collector Series, A9831, LP and CD w/5 additional cuts

A mysterious shimmering sonic gem - how it was ever released (in 1969) seems miracle enough, and its reissue even more timely. Skip Spence (gtr & vox) was a main man in the excellent though not very

successful commercially Moby Grape. Here, he sounds like a mad mountain hermit lost in a blizzard in Wyoming, suffering all the woes of the ages yet finding comfort in his demented tunes. 'Books Of Moses' is an ethereal wail over guitar-plucking that resembles ancient lutes, while eerie sound effects of a stone-cutter evoke an awesome Old Testament vision. What a range he has! The deep vox on 'Weighted Down (The Prison Song)' could be Johnny Cash on valium; for 'War In Peace' he turns in an ethereal falsetto with a slight echo, swirled in cymbals and a hesitant tremolo guitar. The lyrics on this record are often opaque and hard to decipher, but 'Cripple Creek' is virtually a ballad, closing with the doom-laden line 'The search to find what wasn't there has brought him back to you'. 'All Come to Meet Her' simply repeats the title in

stuttering measures, suggesting an obscure march towards this inescapable rendezvous. There's a terrifying sense of purpose to each mysterious story. 'Grey/Afro' refuses any comprehension, but will keep you on the edge of your seat for 9 minutes of sheer tension - what will he play next, what is he singing? Skip Spence, an introspective genius. Syd Barrett might be the nearest UK equivalent to this eccentricity. Syd's solo LPs gave me great succour at time of need during my first year away at college...if only I'd had *Oar* as well. (ED)





Destroy All Monsters

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS

1974-1976

**Father Yod / Ecstatic Peace
E47, 3 x CD box**

Long before Stoooge Ron Asheton or MC5-er Mike Davis was involved, long before the 'Bored' single, Destroy All Monsters were prowling Michigan streets spewing out tons of collage booklets and cassette tapes of wild inspirational home recordings - conceptual pieces, spacey jams and dirges wallowing in the mire of Japanese monster films, Val Lewton, AIP, Universal horror films and low-budget sci-fi serials. The original line-up included Mike Kelly, now a famous artist, Jim Shaw, editor of the essential astounding 1990 book, *Thriftstore Paintings* (Heavy Industry, Library of Congress No 90 084442), Mr Cary Loren and the public face and legs of the later incarnation - Niagara. Here's a very appetising and attitude-rich gathering together of 3½ hours of their nutso recordings.

DAM had two very distinct approaches to recording, either drones and pulses set down as a framework with other instrumentals snaking around this constant, or sloppy guitar-based monster songs and chants overlaid with extraneous noise. The former methodology yields 'Space Beat', a loop of sci-fi signal enhanced with twin alto wildness; 'Conga', a steady congabate on the floor tom with lurching waves of violin, distorted and with heavy echo; the hopped-up brain blistering 'Japanophile', haunting overdriven dolphin-speak direct from the tuna nets and a super-reet organ coda. Again with 'Egypto' and 'Electro Banshee' fine results from this same methodology.

The latter approach delivers 'Vampire', sung by Niagara with the great opening line 'bloodsucking fever has got me again...', 'Paranoid of Blondes', 'Hunger For Death', their own Criswell contrivance, and the hometown anthem 'Detroit' where they namecheck Iggy Pop 'he's a David Bowie Puppet (down in Detroit)', Ted Nugent 'he's a phony crazy mother (down in Detroit)' and the Modern Lovers 'Got the power of the AM (down in Detroit)'. It sounds like the Stooges playing on a tranny way off and a second vocal barked out Karaoke style. Like all the tracks on this collection apart from an intense live 'Shakin' All Over' there's the unanchored immediacy of writing to tape, exploring possibilities, not worrying about the practicalities of working up numbers for a standard rock band set up. **(MB)**

***Geisha This!***

MICHIGAN, Book Beat Gallery 1995
ISBN 1-881616-48-7

Not content with making rock'n'roll, DAM were also driven to produce Art! They produced six issues of an eponymous art magazine, filled with collages, lyrics, photos and drawings, which are sampled in this book. I knew nothing about the band when I saw this gorgeous collection in Rough Trade, but it looked so great I had to pick it up. Now collected to accompany the above-mentioned CD set and a Destroy All Monsters exhibition at Book Beat. The sources for this book might be familiar: '50s nudie photos, EC comic strips and magazine adverts, psychedelic / optical illusion graphix and of course the obligatory movie monsters (the approach / aesthetic is not dissimilar to Gary Panter's). But I can't resist the humour and imagination and visual flair of this stuff, and it's a revelation to me that this was being done back in the '70s. To save money, the original

magazines were printed on whatever paper the band could find, often pre-printed materials such as leaflets. This process gave rise to unexpected visual effects. *Geisha This!* doesn't attempt to reproduce the original materials exactly as they were published, but emulates them in spirit - so much thought and care has gone into the paper stocks, and printing different overlaying colours. It's a beauty! Too much for one sitting, just take in a few pages at a time. Cary Loren writes pieces on both the band and the magazine, explaining the DAM manifesto and the different qualities that each member brought to the project - and there's a flexi single included to round out the package. Apparently a compilation of the film work by some of the members of the band is due. I wish these multi-talented individuals would put on a show round my neighbourhood! **(HR)**

Limited to 1000 copies.

Book Beat: 26010 Greenfield, Oak Park, MI 48237, USA
 And through Forced Exposure



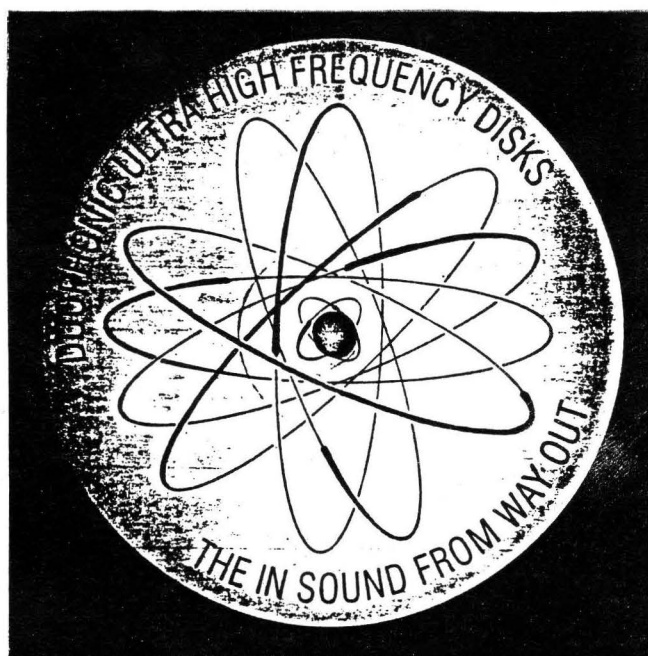
STEREOLAB: Risk-Free Music

by Harley Richardson

I'm a bit mystified by this band's current huge appeal. Their workrate is indeed impressive: Stereolab are so prolific they make The Fall seem like workshys. In the time it takes to say *Emperor Tomato Kitchen* they've knocked out another three LPs and ten singles. But it's a safe bet these will be filled with yet more similar sounding songs based around Modern Lovers and Velvets riffs.

For a band who profess to believe in experimentation their records show every sign of a risk-free studio recording technique: having quickly found a sound they were happy with they've stuck to it. Which'd be fine if it was anything to write home about but with the guitars mixed politely low, the bass muddy and the drums clear but weedy, it's a pretty tepid brew. Only the keyboards occasionally make any impression. This restraint is matched by the musicianship. Rarely do Tim and the gang let rip enough for anything to really catch fire. Too often the listener is left waiting for something to happen, suggesting the band still has a key lesson or two about the dynamics of repetition to learn from their Krautrock forefathers.

But these misgivings aside, I can't deny that Stereolab have produced at least a couple of really special records. I'd suggest you try their 1992 debut ***Peng (Too Pure, Pure CD11)*** and their first compilation of early singles and obscurities, ***Switched On (Too Pure, Slumberland 22)***. What sets these apart is the vocals, which on later records consist more often than not of Laetitia singing over a second vocalist's repeated cutesy French pop phrase. On these two discs more inspired second vocals are intertwined beautifully with Laetitia's lines, behind which everything falls into place and the band's musical faults seem trivial.



Half-Japanese

***Half-Japanese: The Band That Would Be King*, Directed by Jeff Feuerzeig, 1993**

It's a shame this documentary wasn't made five years earlier, when the sentiments expressed wouldn't have been undermined by the music - mostly studio sessions from *Fire in the Sky* and a lame rooftop acoustic set. Even the presence of Mo Tucker couldn't persuade me that this stuff is anything but fourth-rate. The remainder of the film is entertaining fodder for the underground music fan: David and Jad Fair discuss their philosophies of music; the very odd Byron Coley holds forth on why Half-Jap are better than The Beatles; Penn Jillette tells an illuminating tale about the release of *Charmed Life*; and you do get odd glimpses into the inspired side of the Fair brothers' work, courtesy of the video *Half-Japanese Live in Hell*. Less rewarding by far was the gig at **The Garage, 23rd September 1995**: I've given this band the benefit of the doubt once before at the mostly unlistenable show at The Powerhaus, but this time there's no doubt that the god-awful sound is at least partly the fault of the band. Jad Fair created more musical problems than he (or The Garage sound system) could handle, by including three guitarists in his band of merry men, plus a bassist; any dynamics in the songs being flattened out by the resultant overload of distortion. You'd think after all this time Jad would've got the hang of playing third-rate venues like The Garage - Boss Hog recently showed that it's not impossible to achieve a decent sound - but he just seems intent on making things difficult for himself...and us. (HR)

THE FAMILY FODDER

A band from the 1980s who we think were a bit neglected. Ed and Harley explain why...

ED: Family Fodder's music was a comfort to me at a difficult time. The single 'Playing Golf / My Baby Takes Valium' somehow articulated the hollowness of life for me in 1981. Everything I had valued seemed false; but I found balm in the charming voice of [Alig Pearce] running breezily through his own fictional catalogue of futility: '...when I didn't want sex I wanted something else...and now I want to be dead' and it spoke of my own despair. I also had a tape of the first This Heat album, to add to my sounds of anguish. The irony was that these tapes were linked to the cause of my despair; the college friends who had compiled them for me were having a bad influence on me (which would later get even worse) and this 'new' music was in my mind inextricably linked with the alternative views of life they stood for. But my values survived, and grew stronger; after I came to London, I sought out all the Family Fodder records I could, although not one of them came close to providing that bittersweet thrill of anguish found in the eerie sounds of 'Playing Golf': that Rip Van Winkle snoring and the hideous rush of the [? backwards-taped] 'DEAD' vocal. However they were still musically inventive and full of ironic humour. So I passed on the disease (via cassettes) to my good buddy Harley in about 1987...

HARLEY: This was at a time when I had recently discarded U2 and Simple Minds, New Order and the Sugarcubes in favour of the Fall and the Butthole Surfers. It seemed like my horizons had suddenly expanded beyond all my expectations — there was a world of wild and exciting music out there and I wanted to experience as much of it as I could. I've since realised that such music is more rare and special than I then thought. Family Fodder now seem to me to be an anachronism, where they should be typical, their attitude to creativity a world away from the tunnel-vision posing that masquerades as self-expression and forms most of what we nowadays know as 'alternative music'. Rock and dub predominated amongst the many styles Family Fodder employed, but their work includes daft spoken word pieces, demented use of unusual sounds and instruments, chants, and a twenty-minute piano and drums number. And if all that sounds like the work of an embarrassing avant garde outfit, don't be fooled. Hookwise they may not be the Beatles, but then again the Beatles never wrote as beautiful and joyous a song as the Fodderis 'Film Music'.

Ed and I decided to spread the word to you Sound Projector readers. However, background detail on this mysterious band is thin on the ground, with only an unenlightening entry in the *Guinness Book of Indie Bands* to help us get to know them. Family Fodder were all the more curious for the fact that not one of its twenty-plus members and associates appeared to have gone on to do anything else within the music industry (or

so we thought), a rare occurrence in the incestuous world of indiedom. Ed and I figured that a good place to start would be with Dominique Levillain (the most frequent singer) and Alig Pearce (occasional vocalist and co-writer of most of the songs) and, thanks to Mike from These Records, we managed to track them down. Dominique was living in France, well beyond the reach of a Sound Projector expenses account, and Alig in the more convenient Brixton...

Alig Pearce Interview, 3rd April 1994

HARLEY So tell us about Family Fodder then.

ALIG Well, what don't you know? Where does Family Fodder start for you?

ED 1979. We've got a partial discography which we'd like you to complete if possible.

ALIG Yeah I probably can. I haven't got any Family Fodder records except one. I'm terrible at keeping things. I ended up sending them off to people for a gig or a radio interview or something and it was always my last copy.

ED What were you doing before Family Fodder?

ALIG I was doing the same thing, just messing around with a four-track in a basement near the Barbican with various friends who I knew at the time, some of whom became members of Family Fodder and some of whom didn't. Family Fodder wasn't really a group. It was more just recordings with various different people which did turn into a group at various times, most recently about five years ago. But in 1979 I made a demo of a few songs with various different people playing on them, myself playing a lot of the instruments, and I took them round to a couple of people I knew. At that time it was so easy to get a record deal and in no time at all I had two records out. There was also Frank Sumatra which came out at the same time which was from the same stable of recordings.

ED Frank Sumatra? I didn't know about that.

ALIG Frank Sumatra died without trace. It was a record put out on a label called Small Wonder. They put out three twelve inches at the same time. One was the Cure's first record and another was Bauhaus' 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. These three records came out at the same time and Frank Sumatra sold about fifty

copies and the others did pretty well for themselves. But it was actually Family Fodder under a different name. It's a twelve inch called *Te Deum*. There must be plenty of copies around because nobody bought any.

HARLEY Had you had any musical training before starting Family Fodder?

ALIG Yeah. I had a classical training as a pianist from the age of six till about twelve and then I started getting interested in pop music and jazz and stuff and it kind of petered out.

ED Is the idea with early Family Fodder that you were the nucleus, bringing together these other talents?

ALIG Yeah. There was a group of us around about 1978 who were sort of trying to put a group together and we didn't really know how to go about it. We played a lot together and if we had have had a group I think it would have been called The Sheep's Pig. That was the nucleus of the people who played on the Family Fodder records. There was Martin Harrison who's since become an engineer. He was specially into reggae. He'd worked on some Lee Perry stuff, that kind of thing. There was Mick Hobbs

who went on to play with The Work and also Jad Fair. And Rick Wilson who was the drummer for The Work as well, a bloke called Ian Hill who is an accordionist now, plays in Tangos. There was Felix Fiedorowicz who still lives in Southall and plays the Bassoon and does weird music.

ED And Dominique Levillain?

ALIG Dominique was my girlfriend. That nucleus was together for getting on for two years and then Dominique and I split up as a couple. It carried on for a little while but got a bit more awkward. It was only after that time that a group called Family Fodder started doing some gigs but that was no longer with Dominique. We did two or three tours abroad which I guess would be in 1981-1982.

ED And then...?

ALIG Well some people in the group didn't get on very well with other people in it. It disintegrated. I carried on for a while and then there were a couple more releases.

ED That would include *All Styles*?

ALIG Yeah. Well, *All Styles* was basically the death of Family Fodder. I was working on another group with some friends of mine which we called Music For Spooks. We were trying to get the band together and we were organising a tour and writing material and to get a bit of money I just proposed to the then Family Fodder record company, Fresh, to do a compilation of home recordings which we'd got. I proposed to them that they give me some tiny advance like £500 which

they did, so we spent it on getting the other group on the road and the record was not seen as up to standard. It was very much a home-made thing and it was very patchy and that was basically the end of Family Fodder's recording career. I think it sold about 100 copies.

ED Oh dear. So that was the last real release then?

ALIG I think it might have been. But I've been doing the same thing ever since. I've been constantly active. I was playing for two years with a

group called Lo Yo Yo, a sort of co-operative group with two girls and two guys, and we were touring around Europe a lot until about 1986. Then I took up the accordion and I started busking all over Europe and moved to Switzerland for three years.

HARLEY Busking Family Fodder songs?

ALIG No, I was playing Irish Folk, Tangos, Waltzes, Classical, Jazz, Hungarian, Russian, everything. I've been a professional accordionist for the past seven years. That's how I've earned my living. Like tonight I'm playing in a restaurant. I'm playing three or four nights a week. Restaurant kind of music.

HARLEY How do you enjoy that?

ALIG Sometimes I enjoy it a lot and sometimes I don't. It depends entirely on the people. Where did I get to? I reformed Family Fodder in about 1989 for a couple of tours. This was with Dominique, the singer,



and Mick and Rick who'd also been in the band and a couple of other guys who hadn't. But still people didn't get on with each other, so we packed it in. And since that I've been doing a solo show with a computer which is called Johnny Human. And that's basically what I've been doing for the past four years. For a couple of tours there was a band called The Johnny Human Expedience which was the same kind of thing but with some other guys doing their songs as well. In the last two years I've probably done twenty gigs in London as Johnny

Human, always in small pubs, kind of bottom of the bill, four other acts or something, y'know, a few friends coming along and that's been it.

ED I get the impression with quite a few independent bands that some of them tend to do better in Europe than in Britain.

ALIG Well the music scene's much healthier in Europe, I mean in terms of bands getting paid. In a way the music scene is really healthy in England, just 'cause there's so many really good musicians. They just seem to keep on coming. I don't think there's a very good standard of music around at the moment but there's a good standard of musicians. There always is in London. I don't know why. Maybe because we do have it a bit more difficult than people in some other countries.

ED But in terms of making a career and getting paid regularly you're slightly better off in Europe?

ALIG Yeah well I mean the indie scene at the moment, the whole way it's set up is that you put out a record in England, you lose money doing so, you try to get a place in the indie chart or to get an interview or a review or whatever and on the strength of that you sell records to Germany, Japan, Holland and the USA, France to a certain extent -- the markets that are more healthy. And everybody does that. Every indie band that thinks in any way at all about business, that's what they do. They use England as a showcase market to sell records abroad. And



everybody's doing it. And it's been working towards that for about twenty years.

HARLEY So have there been any Johnny Human records?

ALIG Well, I did a single which I put out myself when I was living in Switzerland and selling is not my strong point so I made a small pressing of singles and I think I gave most of them away and sold one or two at gigs. I had a few in shops in Switzerland and Germany but it certainly didn't make a great mark on the world and I haven't got a copy so I can't even show you one.

ED Something else for us to collect!

ALIG In the last six months I've been recording at home. I've hired some equipment and basically I started off doing my Johnny Human show which is a computer based thing but, having said that, it's not like any computer-based music you've probably heard. It's a bit like folk music or sixties rock or something.

ED Not Howard Jones?

ALIG It's not like Howard Jones and not at all like the techno stuff that's happening at the moment. I started asking more and more friends to come in and play this and that instrument and then eventually to start writing their own songs on top of things I'd done and doing stuff without the computer with percussionists and so on and there's a whole body of 16-track recordings. There's about 25 tracks which are all mixed that I've done in the past few months at home.

And, not having found anyone to put them out, I've borrowed about five hundred quid and I'm forming a very low budget record label which is called Alligator Records. We've got three releases scheduled. The first one is a single coming out by Professor Zoom. Professor Zoom was here only a half an hour ago. He's singing a couple of songs that I've written with him and then there will be another Johnny Human release which is a Lou Reed cover version. And then there is a CD which we haven't quite decided the name of but I think the group's going to be called Vox Humana. So that's what I've been doing basically and this is all coming out, hopefully.

ED Does this strike you as a good time to be forming an independent record label?

ALIG No, it's the pits. It's the worst time that there has been in the last fifteen years but I've been in the wilderness for ten years. I've been writing songs. I've been working all the time. I've been touring, I've been making demos, I've been sending them to record companies and nobody wants to put stuff out so all I can do is borrow bits of money, work hard doing gigs and various odd jobs so that I've got a bit of money in case the records don't sell and I'm just going to keep pumping them out every month. I've got albums' worth of material. In terms of recording demos I've done one or two albums a year for the past ten years, although some of them are the same material.

ED Did you always work at home on four-track facilities? Or sometimes in the studio?

ALIG You can hire out a kind of minimal studio set-up at home and it does work out a lot cheaper, especially if you hire from friends and get friendly prices, but I'd love to go in the studio and have someone else do the engineering 'cause that's a bit of a burden. You're split between trying to perform and engineering as well.

ED Right. I was going to ask you about the influence of dub on Family Fodder but from what you say that was due to another band member, or were you interested in it as well?

ALIG I think everybody was around that time.

ED Reggae was very popular, wasn't it, a lot of it on Peel and so on?

ALIG Yeah, well, dub has totally shaped what everyone's listening to at the moment, all the dance music. The style of mixing comes from dub completely. It's probably gone in a direction that people wish it hadn't but...

ED You studied it from records I take it?

ALIG Yeah. I mean I personally didn't work with anyone well known. I played some accordion for Linton Kwesi Johnson but I've never met him. I was in the studio at a different time. Yeah, from listening to records and basically just messing around in the studio. In Family Fodder Martin Harrison was the one who was most into that and he went on to work with On-U Sound. Yeah, we were all coming out of the punk scene and dub was a big thing around. But also

at the same time a big influence which didn't catch on so much but looked like it was going to be African guitar music. It came in a bit later, around about 1980 or something, all these groups like King Sunny Ade and all the things like that, they were very big at the time. It was sort of as influential as dub. But it kind of went out a bit.

HARLEY How were Family Fodder songs composed? Straight onto tape?

ALIG Most of the Family Fodder songs were my songs, but not all of them. Some of them came from improvising, some of them were written onto tape, not usually in the studio but at home, and some of them were songs that I wrote either with the piano or with the guitar. There's other things that were complete collaborations like the *Schizophrenia Party* which was a slightly different style but that was much more to do with what the group was jamming at that time. But for people who are interested in that sort of thing, they were usually written tune first and words afterwards. Nowadays I tend to write the other way round, the words first and the tune next.

ED I was going to ask a bit about the lyrical content, without getting too pretentious I hope. 'Playing Golf' had quite an effect on me at the time when I first heard it - the kind of witty, ironic debunking of very bourgeois values.

ALIG Yeah, I suppose that was what was at the back of my mind. Most of my lyrics I write pretty much on automatic pilot and then I look at it later to see what it means or I don't even. Sometimes people tell me you wrote this song that's about this that or the other and I say 'what?' There was one of my songs that somebody told me was about cunnilingus. That was total news to me. Yeah, it's sort of stream of consciousness things and for better or for worse that's more or less what it is.

HARLEY Do you edit much?

ALIG Yeah, a little bit. But I generally like the way they come out. Sometimes I write something that someone else in the group finds offensive or silly or they suggest improvements. That's happened a lot with the people I'm working with at the moment, particularly when there's been another singer. I give them a lyric and they change whole lines out of it and that's fine.

HARLEY How closely do you stick to the recorded versions of the songs when you're playing live?

ALIG We play the songs, but not exactly the versions that were on the records.

HARLEY It'd be pretty difficult in some cases, I guess.

ALIG Yeah, there was speeded up tape and backwards tape and stuff like that, as well as out of tune and out of time playing that we tried not to reproduce as well. No, the funny thing about Family Fodder at the time was I thought it was quite a heavy band and people didn't see it like that at all. They thought it was a very whimsical, fluffy, English sort of thing and, in fact, if I ever listen to the stuff now, I

hear it's not heavy at all. The stuff with guitar does sound a bit thin and not very loud, but I saw it as quite heavy at the time.

ED Have you any idea how were you perceived in the music press?

ALIG No, there were a few interviews, but we never really caught on. The first record, 'Playing Golf', sold three and a half thousand, which in those days wasn't particularly fantastic, although it was better than respectable. If you sold a thousand you'd think about doing a follow-up and if you sold two thousand you'd definitely do a follow-up, because it made a very tiny profit. But that sold quite well and all the records after that didn't. It just got worse and worse. People, especially abroad, thought that Family Fodder were a cult group in England, but basically we were unknown, apart from a few John Peel appearances.

HARLEY Did you ever get to do any Peel sessions?

ALIG No. John Peel really loved the first record and then he sort of went off us. I think he played one or two of the later singles once. 'Playing Golf' was on about eight times, but I made a big mistake by sending him an acetate before the record was out, and he actually played it a lot when the record was not available. But John Peel's great really, isn't he? Some of the stuff he plays I think is absolutely crap but he's out there, y'know, doing something.

HARLEY Who did the artwork? There was some strange stuff on some of the covers, especially 'Playing Golf'.

ALIG That was my sister Sally actually who did that. She's designed the new Alligator Records label. I did some of them myself. I'm a bit of a painter and a cutter and sticker. This [referring to the cover of *Monkey Banana Kitchen*] was two photos of different walls, one of which was just a wall in a bedroom which was painted a bit psychedelically and the other which was totally rotten and peeling. We just had a friend take photos of the walls. It was when commercial color xerox machines were just coming out. It was about two quid a shot and if you really sweet-talked the girls in the office they'd let you come in and do it yourself and wiggle the things about under the photocopier.

ED Laurie Rae Chamberlain was doing a lot of that at the time, wasn't he?

ALIG Yes he was. You know of Laurie Rae?

ED Yes, through the second album by This Heat.

ALIG At the time Family Fodder came out, This Heat were around and we were in awe of them.

ED Yeah, that's a period I'm interested in. I thought punk rock was a good idea but I thought the music that came after it was much more interesting. It seemed to open a lot more doors for people to experiment.

ALIG Yeah, punk rock was obviously a good idea. I don't know, it seems there's always a

lot of waves in rock which are just basically promoting the same thing.

ED Especially now.

ALIG I think after the early eighties I hardly ever heard any pop music until recently. I just didn't listen to it to the radio. It's funny. I'm a terrible listener. I'm not very interested in records at all. I was up until I was about seventeen and then I just got less and less interested. There's whole movements of music that have passed me by completely. I'm not much of a music fan. I like a few people though. I've always liked Lou Reed and I've always liked John Lennon.

ED Is there anything in the classical field that interests you?

ALIG Yeah, a bit. I quite like early music where it crosses over from folkloric music.

ED Very early?

ALIG Well when they say early music they mean thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. I like Bartok and Beethoven in certain moods. I like music generally. I don't have too much problem with most kinds of music. I have a problem with some people's attitudes. When music is pretentious, I don't like that. I even like country now which I always hated.

ED What strikes you as pretentious music?

ALIG Well I don't think music itself can be pretentious. I think it's more the attitude of the people doing it, the words and the way you behave to get publicity and things like that, but mainly the words. Just thinking yourself important, thinking yourself highly important.

ED That's the kind of thing that gets the attention though, unfortunately.

ALIG Yeah, well good luck to them. Everyone thinks of themselves as important, don't they, in some way? It's essential for survival. But you've just got to



balance it. I suppose at heart I'm a Beatles fan basically.

HARLEY Any period in particular?

ALIG I think all the periods, but I especially like the psychedelic period. I just think it was a great time for music generally. Obviously we see that through rose-tinted spectacles and there's been a lot of better music before and since but I think the bands around that time were pretty lucky to be in that environment.

ED I'll go along with that. Especially in America. American psychedelic music is astonishing.

HARLEY How about Beefheart?

ALIG Oh yeah. I think he's a genius. Strangely enough, the album I like the best is not the one I used to. It's called *Clear Spot*. He was given a name producer, or an up and coming producer and the record company were really bugging him. They wanted something with a bit more of a reliable sound and they got this guy called Ted Templeman who did Rush and stuff like that and that record, in a way, is his most mainstream thing, without being very commercial. It's quite gritty. It's the most closest to rhythm'n'blues. It's very good. My influences, especially at the time of Family Fodder, were the same as a lot of people's at the time and still now - Lou Reed, Syd Barrett and, me personally, the Beatles and the Kinks and folk music. I was one of those guys. I just thought of another record for your discography. Do you know who Hermione is? She's a terrible French singer who was around and still is to this day. I wrote a song for her. Her record was called 'Torture', y'know, the Everly Brothers song, and I wrote a song for the B-side.

HARLEY Have you ever heard any Bongwater? It's always struck me that the spoken word stuff they did was kind of similar to some Family Fodder things like 'Film Music'.

ALIG Yeah well that's a thing lots of people were doing at the time, most obviously David Byrne and Brian Eno. Basically they set the blueprint for what's happening today on the dance scene where everything is found material. There's, say, three different movements going on in the early eighties which have basically spawned the monster we know and love as dance music: dub/reggae, industrial Test Department-type things and this found material movement coming more out of the avant-garde scene and basically those are the three movements which have spawned what is popular culture at the moment. I think. Musicians who are now thirty-something are looking back to that time, 1980-81, and saying it was a golden time. All those musicians were like 'we were fighting for these things to become acceptable' - the use of sound, the use of things that you hadn't previously played yourself, found material, the use of the mixing desk as an instrument and all that. And these same people are knocking the dance music of nowadays which has basically taken all those things to

their logical conclusion. So, y'know, you can't really grumble. At that time we saw all those techniques as revolutionary and they've been turned into everyday Knees Up Mother Brown, How's Your Father, I Won't Say My Mother-In-Law's Fat But...

ED That's a fair point.

ALIG And we were responsible.

ED But you could argue that what we have today is just technique in the service of nothing else but more technique, whereas before it was technique in the service of trying to say something.

ALIG It's also the punk idea of you don't have to be a musician to make a record. Oh...We're being invaded. [Enter Alig's girlfriend]

ED I think that's our cue to finish.

FAMILY FODDER / ALIG PEARCE DISCOGRAPHY

Family Fodder

- | | | |
|--------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1979 | Playing Golf (With My Flesh Crawling) / My Baby Takes Valium 45 | Parole / Fresh
PURL 4 / FRESH 1 |
| 1980 | Te Deum 45 EP
(by Frank Sumatra and the Mob) | Small Wonder
TEENY 1 |
| 1980 | Warm / Desire 45 | PURL 6 / FRESH 8 |
| [1980] | Sunday Girls 45 EP | KNOT 1 / FRESH 9 |
| 1980 | Debbie HarrRy / A Version 45 | FRESH 15 |
| 1980 | Monkey Banana Kitchen LP | FRESH LP 3 |
| 1980 | Savoir Faire / Carnal Knowledge 45 | FRESH 22 |
| 1980 | Savoir Faire / I'll Be Yours 45 | Crammed (Belgium)
CRAM 2457 |
| [1980] | Torture / Foxes Will 45 | IN CAMERA |
| 1981 | Film Music / Room 45 | FRESH 32 |
| 1981 | Greatest Hits LP | CRAM 016 |
| 1981 | Schizophrenia Party 45 EP | FRESH 37 |
| [1982] | Big Dig / Plant Life 45 | FRESH |
| 1983 | All Styles 2 X LP | JUNGLE / FREUD 2 |
| 1983 | Coral / Frustration 45 | JUNG 4 |

Johnny Human Expedience

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| 1988 | Melancholy Love Song / Pluperfect 45 | POP 01 |
| 1994 | Urban Menace / 1965 45
(by Professor Zoom) | ALIG 01 |
| 1994 | Waiting for my Man 45 | ALIG 02 |

And see THE DISCURATOR'S DEN for review of Vox Humana Unsampler ALIG CD01.

The Listening Post.

**Vinyl Excavations
by John Bagnall**



Does Folk Music exist? I'm not even sure if CD chain-stores use the category any more. More likely they shunt those shiny jewel-cases under the wider banner 'World Music', which begs the obvious dumb question - what is the origin of the remaining stock? Martian? How about Venusian? If we really were heading for a day-glo Jetsons future the thought would be kinda thrilling...

I suppose the purist definition of Folk is music which comes from a popular ethnic tradition rather than serious art music, which is the creation of the high-brow composer artist. Let's side-step that music which is folk-based (and could include anything from Lonnie Donegan to The Incredible String Band) to dally with the purely traditional. If you're English these might be the songs some rustic forefather way back down your mouldy family tree might've passed onto his son while they went a-harvest-gathering. It's certainly very English to look back and romanticise about Samuel Palmer moons over pre-mechanised farms. What could be more 'rootsy' than jerkin-clad yokels singing 'Bushes and Briars' in a thatched tavern? But that's history and the tradition has died. We all know George Michael or The Spice Girls will be blaring from today's tractor-cab radio.

But there must be some corners of this planet untouched by the levelling grip of global musical communication? Go to some isolated Breton village and you might hear the squeel of an ancient bagpipe. Hitch a ride to Tibet and you could be lucky enough to encounter an authentic devotional chant. Snowshoe it up North for an Inuit fishing song. Record labels like Folkways and Topic have earnestly captured such obscure sounds for years. There they are in their cute

hessian-colour sleeves. You don't really have to travel any further than a specialist record store.

Music today is generally a commodity we buy; and if much purely traditional music seems to belong to dusty archives, doesn't that make Folk just another (rather fossilised) consumer option? Peter Stampfel, Greenwich Village folkie and member of The Holy Modal Rounders, wrote perceptively in 1964:

If I were a banjo player sixty years ago I would've played the music from my neighbourhood. All of everything that I knew about music would be what I learned from the people around me. Now it's different. My frame of reference is not my neighbourhood but the whole world and all of history. Mass communication means that almost everyone today has heard more music than almost anyone sixty years ago. Mass communications will soon link the world together...and a worldwide popular music is going to happen sooner than you think.

I've found myself in folk clubs just two times. It was the obvious place to find that funny subculture who buy into a lifestyle which exalts the non-electric, and whose preferred drug is the warm slop they call Real Ale. The first venue was a disappointment. Xeroxed song sheets, of carefully word-processed lyrics, were handed out. Two student-types led the hearty communal singing as they bashed away at Yamaha acoustic guitars like third-rate buskers. The repertoire was an odd mix of overfamiliar beery 'classics' like 'The Jug of Punch', the schlock social observation of 'Streets of London' and some Everly Brothers numbers. Wait a minute, the Everly Brothers? It didn't take a Greil Marcus to note this wasn't the real Folk Thing.

THE BAG-STEREO EFFECT

The second club felt like stumbling into an assembly of initiates without an invitation. A bearded giant stood at the bar and sang, unaccompanied and eyes shut. His brethren and sistren joined in the choruses. A sparrow-like girl intoned a tragic ballad to hushed respect, then left. Some people were drinking from pewter tankards. Others smoked drooping Sherlock Holmes pipes. A ruddy faced old timer offered a tune that had something to do with seafaring and death.

None of the songs were familiar and certainly none were written in the last fifty years. 500 yards down the street sweaty-faced youths sucked on American beer bottles and stared at video jukebox screens.

Visiting this club was quite an experience, but not one that impelled me to search out Martin Carthy LPs in the second hand racks. I have a fair share of folk-rock on used vinyl, but folk-rock is a different kettle of suede fringe-sleeved jackets altogether. Ever since Bob Dylan and The Band plugged in their unholy crackling amp-stacks at one Newport Folk Festival, the course of folk-rock had more to do with Beatlesque pop-star status than the faithful rendering of wayfarer ballads. Folk-rock is a hybrid and, like much of today's cross-fertilising 'world' genres, this implies development. Anyhow, the usual selection of Folk at record fairs hasn't exactly been mouth-watering. The Chieftains? Julie Felix? The Corries? Excuse me, isn't that a rare Velvets bootleg I spy in a box over there?

Elektra Records' **Folk Sampler 5** was however a must-have find which fits snugly into the narrow scope of these ramblings. This beautiful American artefact dates from 1958 and is tightly housed in a cardboard sleeve so sturdy you could eat your dinner off it. A guitar plucking jack-in-the-box is framed by miniature

album jackets from which the sampler makes its selection. Ah look, The Shanty Boys, banjoes aloft, are standing next to a colonial potbelly stove. That must be Cynthia Gooding, sitting on a Mexican rug with a Spanish bullfight poster on her wall. Theodore Bikel sports a long black overcoat and leans on his guitar case in a highly-staged mockup of NY's Jewish quarter. The inner booklet, a gorgeous piece of olive, turquoise and black 50s design, offers further information on the featured folksters.

The sampler was clearly a proud compendium of the staggeringly worldwide folk music Jac Holzman's Elektra label was releasing at the time. This was Elektra long before they signed leather-panted buffoons like Jim Morrison or the Neanderthal electric catharsis of The Stooges. Each selection, whatever the style or ethnic origin, is played perfectly straight. At this point in the 50s any stylistic hybrid or individual interpretation was breaking the purist rules. So what you get might be Bulerias' Spanish Flamenco, followed by a 19th century railroad song, followed by Gene and Francesca's revival of an old French children's ditty. At times the serious effort to faithfully recreate centuries-old music can become unwittingly funny. The Randolph Singers' 17th century tavern song is chanted in accents so Queen's-English proper and with a tempo so

stiff that a Restoration drinkery is the furthest thing from your mind. Conversely Theodore Bikel's Jewish songs benefit from the solemn approach. 'Kum Aher du Folozof' exalts the miraculous qualities of a celebrated rabbi in gravely beautiful Yiddish intonation.

The rediscovery of traditional folk happened long before liberal hepsters began buying up albums on cool labels like Elektra. Serious composers, instead of



THE BAG-STEREO EFFECT

turning up their noses at peasant music, found a return to the source tunage of their own countries both romantic and rich in melody. Bela Bartok was open-eared enough to incorporate his native Hungarian folk tunes into orchestral works. In this century Americans like Aaron Copland dug up old Shaker Community hymns, and maverick genius Charles Ives quoted and deconstructed similar material. In merrie England, Francis James Child and Cecil Sharp scoured rural areas with historical fervour for fast disappearing tunes. English visionary composer Ralph Vaughan Williams made contact with these songs and became an activist in collecting the vernacular sounds of his heritage. By the first decade of this century he was hunting out the last generation of shepherd and blacksmith singers and notating songs from their septuagenarian lips.

Chancing upon EMI's ***As I Walked Out: Folk Song arrangements by Vaughan Williams*** from 1978 wasn't the discovery of a rarity. The



composer is justly feted by the mainstream so I'm sure there must be a similar collection still in CD print. But here was an opportunity to hear ten traditional songs and carols, not just from leafy Wessex and East Anglia, but also from France and windswept Newfoundland. The crediting of tenor vocalist, pianist and violinist reminds the listener that while the texts are original these are arrangements by a classical artist. Some sympathy may lie with a Dorset labourer who said of Vaughan Williams' arrangements 'It's nice for him to have the piano, but it does make it sound awkward for the listener.' But Vaughan Williams knew that folk songs came from the peasantry, a class which no longer existed and one to which English composers certainly didn't belong. Those devotees of folk clubs who dress up as yokels for the night might

feel their music has here been hijacked by portly professionals in white tie and tails. If inverted snobbery is your bag I guess this is the wrong record to hear.

As the burgundy EMI label begins to spin, the strength of the sparsely accompanied material reveals itself. Agrarian themes of doomed romance and simple piety set a tone of grave contemplation and reticent beauty. Even the carols evoke dour stony chapels under sleet-lashed elms. Vaughan Williams seems to have been most strongly attracted to the darker bracken-tangled corners of his folk heritage. Jolly revels round the village Maypole are eschewed in favour of a more universally understood human yearning and sufferance.

The album's pacing skilfully leads the listener from short, lighter pieces to the lengthier and more profound, and finally to the chilling majesty of the last three songs, the only to feature violin and piano together. 'How cold the wind doth blow' (or 'The Unquiet Grave') is described in the sleeve notes as 'one of the greatest and most harrowing tunes in the world'. It's certainly hard to hold back the tears on first hearing. A love which desires to transcend the problems of one partner being in the grave may, in cold print, seem over-gothic and lugubrious, especially when the corpse speaks of how cold his lips will be to kiss. Yet the melancholic sweep of the tune and its slow-building, aching accompaniment transfigures the subject into one of the most beautiful noises you'll ever hear. Nick Cave would kill to write such an overpowering tragedy. It surely proves how the resuscitation of Folk Song can be of more than historical or marginal appeal. The day I find a busker forego 'Streets of London' in favour of 'How cold the wind doth blow', he will merit a pot of gold in his guitar case.

In Future Listening Posts:

WRITTEN OUT OF ROCK HISTORY:

The mellotronic threat of Prog

GREGORIAN CHANT ON CD:

Relaxation therapy for the Godless



ECSTATIC VOLUME

Organ Music of Olivier Messiaen

By John Bagnall

**Thomas Trotter, *MESSIAEN : Messe
de la Pentecôte*,
DECCA CD 436 400-2**

Arch French hi-brow Olivier Messiaen (1908-92) never shirked from musical innovation and appears to've spent his earthly span resolutely ploughing further and yet further into the realm of 'difficult' composition. The notation of birdsong, Hindu rhythms and the ascetic modes of plainchant were among his obsessions. I could throw in some relevant jargon like "non retrogradable rhythms" or 'modes of limited transposition' but I honestly don't know what the heck they mean. (If you are up on that stuff then you'll dribble into your vest over this CD's hefty booklet).

But if the thought of such music is enough to send you whining back to your cosy rock collection, please don't. Messiaen's formal strangeness never abandons you on a barren plateau of sound-for-sound's sake intellectuality. A devout and heavy duty Roman Catholic, this visionary composer employed his

individual avant-garde language in the service of what was obviously an intensely felt faith. So the listener can enjoy these great monolithic hunks of sound on a gut (or even soul) level, much as some greasy stripling might become enveloped in the sheer tangible ecstatic volume and dynamic of his/her preferred guitar god. Although, naturally, there's no six-string within spitting distance here, that analogy isn't stretching things too much: if you want power-chords Messiaen's got 'em (but go easy, they can be bowel scouring).

All of these pieces are church organ works cut in '93 by Thomas Trotter at Eglise Collégiale Saint Pierre de Douai, France, and the selection spans from 1930 to 1950. Capable of furious eardrum-blowing sustain and angels spinning on a pinhead heavenliness the organ in Messiaen's work evokes the thunderbolt authority of the Roman Magisterium, and the composer's own exultant interpretation of the Christian mythos. The effect is, to say the least, dizzying.

As you might've guessed there's not even an inch allowed here for traditional Baroque organ trills. The booklet righteously states 'Messiaen was the only composer capable of liberating the organ from its halo of incense so as to make it a crucible for modern thought'. This purging of familiar 'churchy' sound-patterns liberates every one of these compositions, especially the monumental head-clearing 26 minutes that is 'Messe de la Pentecôte'. The listener is drawn in and lifted up to a fearless spiritual unknown.

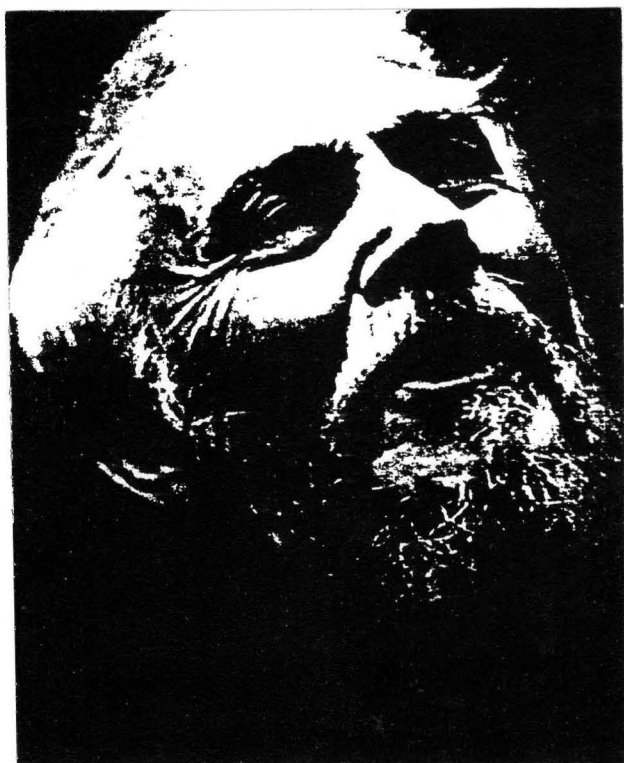
Certainly a faultless place to dip in, this CD may even whet your appetite for Gillian Weir's multi-disc set of Messiaen's organ works. These are musical miracles, one-hour of Messiaen and you'll either run back to Mom or else be thirsting for Catholic Catechesis!



'What Avails to Lament?'

The Music of Harry Partch

By Bosco Hazard



Enclosure One: Four Historic Art Films by Madeleine Tourtelot with Music by Harry Partch
INNOVA 400 (Video)

Enclosure Two: Historic Speech-Music Recordings from the Harry Partch Archives
INNOVA 401 (4 x CD set)

For the better part of a decade, certain passages from an 8th century Chinese poet have been inscribed in my memory:

Rise and dance in the westering sun | while the urge of youthful years is yet unsubdued | What avails to lament | after one's hair has turned white...like silken thread?

(Before the Cask of Wine)

These are the last words of one of 'Ten Lyrics by Li Po'. The setting, by musical theorist, composer and performer, Harry Partch, begins by imparting to its imagery (spring wind, falling blossoms, wine) an agitated, querulous urgency before its theme (the transience of youth) is announced - at which point the voice, wistful at first, begins wordlessly to dance and soar in a way that is not harsh, but has an edge of wildness, of fever. The words 'rise and dance...' then, are neither a cool observation nor proverbial wisdom, but conjure a sudden and living impulse, courageous in its defiance of time's passing. With something between a sob and a wail the concluding question is posed, and the piece ends, suddenly quiet, with the image of hair turned white. Anguish exhausts itself, gives way to resignation.

Partch was barely in his thirties when he composed this piece, but throughout his work we find the evocation of a tragic catharsis amidst the bitter comedy of life. His setting of a short poem by Ella Young invests the image of rushing waters with its full resonance, and asks:

Why are you so eager to leave the sunlight | so eager for the pool of oblivion?

(The Waterfall)

The question does not weary, because in Partch's setting eagerness and oblivion are conjoined, and reflect one another. It is an image of life in Heraclitean flux; an eternal image of life plunging, heedless of extinction - and heedless of its own brief glory - towards darkness. And if Partch's intonation of the final word has about it something of a 'let's scare the children' theatricality, this hardly mars the authenticity of a vision which is personal, of a music which everywhere derives its impetus from Partch's own voice, with its undertones of darkness and humour. In his last composition, intoning his own text and recalling the world of his childhood, Partch performed his own dance in the westering sun: the last chorus of his 'corporeal' music involves an astonishing, serious jest - the words of which I need only repeat to feel an ecstatic chill launch itself down my spine; words I will not record here, because the words alone are insufficient to evoke that excitement.

The bulk of Partch's early work, from about 1930 until the early 1950s, consists of the setting of words to music: poems and prose, graffiti, newsboy cries - as well as accounts of his own travels across America during the Depression. These pieces are in no sense difficult, though they are often surprising, even startling. Words are framed, carried, accentuated and echoed by an accompaniment which provides more than merely the support for an expressive reading - which constitutes, in fact, an aural staging. The result is genuinely musical, but it is a music whose structure and content is in no way abstract and formal, but dramatic, flowing from the intonation and the meaning of the words. Mimicry is not infrequent: in one of the Li Po songs, the tremor of Partch's adapted viola evokes

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momentarily the chirping and buzzing of insects in the background; in another, one of the two voices is assigned the role of the flute heard by the poet; in 'U.S. Highball', train whistles and the clattering of the freight cars are conjured by Partch's instruments.

Beginning in 1953, Partch issued a series of recordings, which he sold through the mail, on his own **Gate 5** label. In the 1960s, a handful of records were released by CRI (Composers' Recordings Inc), and Columbia Masterworks. At least two of the CRI releases (*The Music of Harry Partch and Petals Fell on Petaluma*) are currently available on CD. The Innova set of four CDs, *Enclosure Two*, rescues and makes available a vital set of early Partch recordings from 1945-47, when Partch had a position at the University of Wisconsin. The set of Ten Li Po Lyrics, composed between 1930 and 1933, represent Partch's earliest mature approach to the musical setting of words.

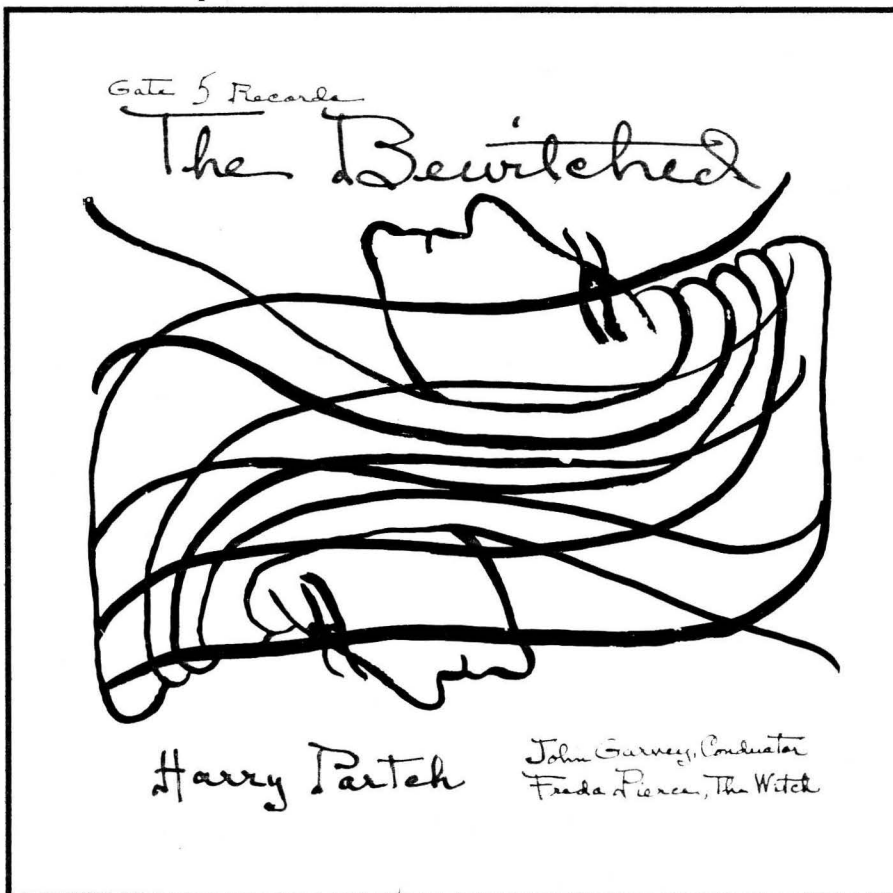
'By The Rivers Of Babylon' was also composed for voice and adapted viola, but was later revised to incorporate two of Partch's other instruments - the chromelodeon and the kithara. The revised version is presented here. The chromelodeon, sounding at first like an out-of-tune harmonium, imposes itself also on 'Dark Brother' - an intense, melancholy setting of two paragraphs from a story by Thomas Wolfe.

'Barstow' - Partch's wonderful framing of eight hitch-hiker inscriptions collected from a railing outside Barstow, California - is altogether lighter and more varied, bringing to life out of these fragments the wanderers who passed by, leaving their mark. A later recording, on *The World of Harry Partch* (CBS), would dispense with the adapted guitar, adding diamond marimba and bamboo marimba, giving the music a punchier, percussive sound. Otherwise, the most significant difference is that, in the later version, the final question 'Why in hell did you come, anyway?' is used as a punchline, where the earlier version is more thoughtful, and the music trails off, as though the reader of these inscriptions has walked away, perhaps turning over the question in his mind, perhaps already thinking of something else.

In a similar vein, the restless, high-spirited, ironic 'US Highball: A Musical Account of Slim's Transcontinental Hobo Trip' uses snatches of conversation, complaints, observations, advice and anecdotes in order to evoke a journey by rail and road from California to Chicago.

It's a long piece, and fairly shapeless, but studded with episodes which grow more distinct with repeated listening.

The 'Two Settings from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*' and 'Y.D. [Yankee Doodle] Fantasy', with their female soprano, and flutes and whistles, are something of a surprise - and sound like nothing so much as the soundtracks to a couple of lost (alas!) 'Columbia Favourite' cartoons from the 1950s. There are also several later pieces, the best of which is the eerily insistent, incantatory 'Bless This Home'. 'Ring Around the Moon' is musically appealing, but the deeply



whimsical vocal intrusions suggest that something else is going on, and for once the well-designed and informative 32pp booklet is not forthcoming. There is also a setting of Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky', which sounds a little perfunctory.

The authentic Partch recordings add up to about an hour and a half - and for this precious and rewarding 90 minutes, you pay your money and you are grateful. What you get, in addition, is 75 minutes of a 1992 performance of Partch's hobo journal with parts for piano, 'Bitter Music'; a recent recording of an early song by Partch, and a version of 'San Francisco - Newsboy Cries' for conventional instruments; as well as an hour-long lecture/demonstration by Partch of his system of music.

The Partch video has been made available in the UK by the British Harry Partch Society. These are historic films - which is to say they are valuable as history - but they have their limitations. 'Windsong', for which Partch composed the soundtrack, is probably the most successful of the four pieces here, in its marriage of music and film. Parts of the same musical soundtrack are utilised in 'Music Studio' which gives a fascinating glimpse of Partch at home with his instruments. 'U.S. Highball' is valuable for its preservation of performance footage, but the sound - to quote an introductory note - is 'lamentable'. The revised version of 'U.S. Highball', adding extra voices and new instruments, while abridging the text, is possibly not an improvement. In 'Rotate the Body in all its Planes' the sound is not lamentable, but execrable; and yet, with a little determination, even this can be viewed with some degree of indulgence. Not for the neophyte, but Partch enthusiasts are bound to appreciate the opportunity to get a look at these films.

If Partch remains widely unknown, this is neither much of a surprise, nor is it a reflection on the quality of his music. One is simply not led by any broad thoroughfare to his door. As a composer, he occupied a margin of his own devising: by adapting and building his own instruments, and by using novel forms of notation suited to music written for those instruments, he erected a barrier against the performance of his work - or at least against the proliferation of such performances.

He may never be 'popular' - not because, as a pioneer, a maverick, an eccentric (all part of the Partch myth, or mystique) he is somehow unapproachable, but because it's almost unimaginable he might be taken up by a crowd - precisely because he is approachable only as an individual. He is not a musical or cultural fact; he is not an example of something, or one thing among many: he is a unique presence. Nowhere is that unique presence better preserved than on these CDs (which faithfully reproduce the crackle and pop of acetate, the hiss of tape) and these recordings, now half a century old.

I might suggest there has never been a better time to introduce yourself to Harry Partch, but perhaps this is not strictly true: any time is a good time for that. But Partch's music is not always available - is not all currently available - and these are treasures rescued from neglect and obscurity, treasures whose value is accurately expressed in another of the Li Po lyrics ('On the Ship of Spicewood'):

My poem is done, I laugh and my delight is vaster than the sea. | Oh, deathless poetry! The songs of Chu-Ping are ever glorious as the sun and moon | while the palaces and towers of the Chu kings have vanished from the hills...

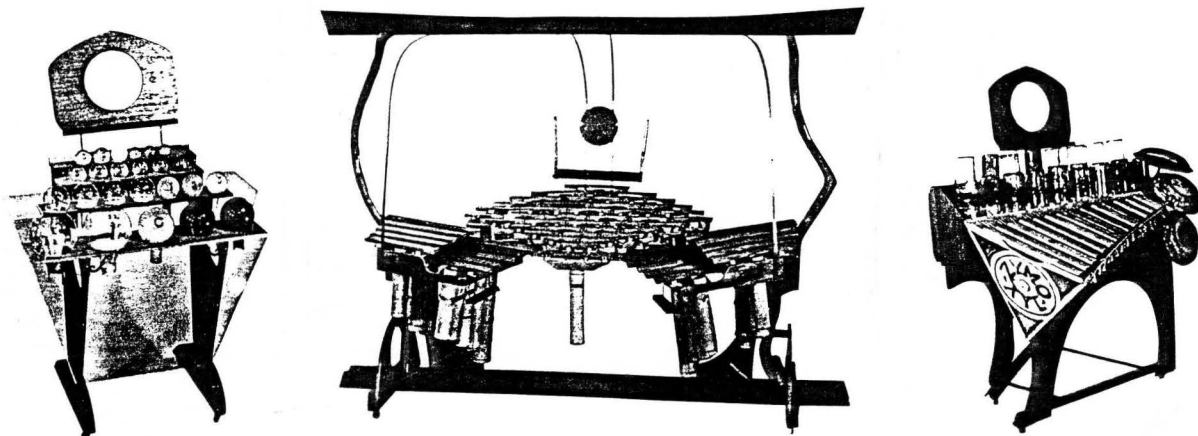


Enclosure Two

Additional notes by the Editor

Initial caveat to the curious listener: there's a LOT of spoken-word material on this item. Some of it, for example the lecture about tunings and intonation, goes on for some time, and even the most hard-bitten Partch fan would find it tough going. So, if you're a beginner, don't start with this or it might just put you off. Get *Delusion of the Fury* if you can find it. *Delusion* tells a hobo story as a dramatic song cycle, elevating the subject to the level of an American Myth. I have always loved that record but have long been simultaneously challenged and delighted by the sheer density of the sound, and the complexity of Partch's musical language, which by then had become highly developed. Only since playing *Enclosure* have I discovered another dimension to *Delusion*. Two tracks in particular are missing links - and suggest how Partch arrived at one point from the other. The first, 'US Highball', attempts to recreate train sounds, as noted above. The second, 'San Francisco Newsboy Cries', is songs, using as a text the cries of Street Vendors selling newspapers. There is nothing patronising about it - not a whiff of Henry Higgins-like condescension, the safe middle-class observing the 'quaintness' of working class dialect. Partch lived on the street, knew those cries, and genuinely heard them as music. This song transcribes and notates them and reproduces them, and besides serving as a tiny snapshot of a lost piece of social oral history, it is a honest and valuable musical statement.

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Now, these works between them served as a prism through which to view *Delusion of the Fury*, for its better interpretation. Mind! They didn't explain it away - the mystery remains intact. But where once it had seemed a high-impenetrable fantasy, I see now how the fabric of it comes from pieces like the two above. So at bedrock, *Delusion* is another honest account of that 1930s hobo and street life - but with extra abstract, artistic and interpretative dimensions layered throughout. To me, it's like Kandinsky's abstractions. In his paintings he started out making legible statements: the clear image of a horse rider was there from the start. As his visual language developed, the horse rider became pure streaks of white paint. To him this was a very clear shorthand visual statement. That is his artistic development. His visual language became more and more private, and richer and deeper as a result. So it is with Partch.

'Bitter Music, Extracts from a Hobo Journal', is another significant work. This performance is a recent recording made for Australian radio, not by Partch but by Warren Burt (vocalist) and Sheila Guyner (piano). The compilers hesitated before issuing this work. The use of piano was something of a compromise for Partch, using those fixed twelve-tones was to kow-tow to classical music, at odds with his fierce determination to construct and work his own instruments, his own scales, his own sounds. Partch made every effort to prevent 'Bitter Music's' survival, and yet here it is. The work combines straightforward reading from a text with sudden exclamations into musical phrasing - a sung speech. You have only to compare the slightly mannered vocal work of Warren Burt with Partch's own naturalistic intoning voice, on other recordings here. This musical parlendo was second nature to him - he could virtually speak in music. With Burt, it has had to be learned. But this is a rather captious observation, as the emotional weight is all here. You should be stunned by the rush of images in the ending moments - Partch found impending apocalypse in the passing cars in the rain, trying to hitch a ride, and all seemed hopeless.

Also of interest to the Partch collector, is Hal Willner's compilation record **Weird Nightmare: Meditations on Mingus, COLUMBIA 472467 2, 1992**. As he has done on previous 'tribute' LP projects, Willner assembled a dazzling collection of contemporary musicians to perform their versions and visions of Charlie Mingus compositions; on many tracks, original Harry Partch instruments were used. Francis Thumm, a musician based in San Diego, has played in Partch's ensembles; he loaned 'about a dozen' of the instruments to Willner for the sessions. I don't have the full story on why Thumm has wound up as official curator of the instrument collection, but it is valued highly as an exceptional example of American history. - so at least someone is looking after these unique items. I had an idea that copies for concert performances and touring purposes were being made, but perhaps that's just wishful thinking. As to the ethics, or the aesthetic achievements of *Weird Nightmare*, the jury's still out on that; for some, the mere presence of Elvis Costello on the record is sufficient to keep it at arm's length. Would Partch have approved of his creations being deployed alongside conventional instruments, simply for the sake of their unusual sound? The sleeve notes avoid this dilemma, and instead muse gently on whether Mingus and Partch (who were contemporaries) ever met, but concludes by celebrating that they have finally met on this record, thanks to 'the inspired alchemy of Hal Willner'. Quite.



MOONDOG

May His Feet Keep Walking

Moondog, *Big Band*, with the London Brass and London Saxophonia, Produced by John Harle
TRIMBA 01001-8

A recent recording from that modern composer maverick, street person and all-round wonderful human being Moondog, aka Louis Hardin. Yes, Moondog is still alive, and yes, he continues to produce beautiful, life-affirming music of charming simplicity. His works still bear the influences of Big Band jazz, for example the syncopated rhythms, a steady bass drum pulse (usually played by Moondog himself) and water-tight charts for the horns; and he continues to display his fondness for turning one simple musical phrase into a Round. For this record *Big Band* he is admirably served by the talents of two London brass ensembles. They are led and produced by the estimable John Harle, a four-eyed well-dressed fellow who has tootled his soprano sax in many a context, be it versions of early music like John Dowland or arrangements of Gershwin for the classical-lite set. This production is also splendidly recorded, so you get the full blast of the brass whamming into your face as surely as if your whole body had been poured like warm milk into the bell of each golden instrument. Everyone who hears *Big Band* enjoys an immediate sense of

well-being and inner harmony; slam on the first track 'Blast Off' and just watch your spirits soar!

This item was crying out to be purchased after the rare event of seeing Moondog live (with the same ensembles and Harle, playing most of the same set) at the South Bank in London in Summer 1995. This was part of Elvis Costello's 'Meltdown' Festival. No matter your opinion of Costello (he seems to attract severe contempt) you must needs tip your trilby in his direction for pulling off this historic Moondog coup; apparently he has only played in London *once before!* Not a soul in the audience was left untouched by this performance; besides the power of the music, there were his touching remarks to the audience, revealing little glimpses of his life on the streets, his political views, his musical career, his loves. And his eccentricity: holding up a percussion instrument, he said, 'This is several hundred pecan shells, in an old sock!' John Harle helped him off-stage as we gave our standing ovation (for those who don't know, Moondog

is blind), and Moondog acknowledged holding aloft his drumstick in salute, a beatific smile emerging from his white whiskery face. The waves of emotion affected us all. People in the audience were crying.

As you probably know, Moondog recorded albums for CBS in the late 1960s (although his career extends back into the 1950s). I have

Moondog (UK CBS 63906) and **Moondog 2** (US, KC 30897)

on vinyl; I have no idea if these have been reissued. Before I went to the Meltdown performance I showed the sleeves of these to Darryl Cunningham, who exclaimed 'He Is Merlin!' *Moondog 2* is a cycle of Round song compositions, performed with percussion and harpsichord; kind of like syncopated madrigals, as



if John Dowland were a sideman for Dizzy Gillespie. There's a lovely printed book of lyrics with a great cover. 'The Wheel was Never Invented', declares one lyric - because the motion of the wheel was something man was already born with, in the movement of our hip and thigh bones. (Incidentally I've always associated this image with the photograph of Moondog on the cover of the Prestige album, recorded in 1956 and reissued as OJC-1741 in 1990; dotted lines indicating the motion of his feet.) This suggests to me something about why Moondog's work is so effective, perhaps for the same reason that the best architecture is that which proceeds from the same proportions of the human figure - it chimes in exactly with an inner vibration common to us all. It seems perfect, obvious.

One related oddity you may wish to investigate is **LOVE CHILD plays MOONDOG 3 Track-EP (Forced Exposure FE-020)**, on which three youngsters - among them the great Alan Licht on guitar - pay tribute to Moondog. Borrowing three short round compositions from *Moondog 2*, they extend the sweet melodies into unexpected areas of psychedelic jamming and feedback, with layers of amateurish vocal, awkward drumming and guitar noise. Plus a great sleeve photo of Moondog in New York. Nice item!



La Monte Young: The Purple Trap

For a long time it was virtually impossible to obtain any recordings of this semi-legendary American composer and musician. Now Gramavision have seen fit to issue a cornucopia of products over the last few years. I found my way here like many other through the excellent La Monte Young article written by Alan Licht in *Forced Exposure* 16. Young has been active since the late 1950s - there have been numerous performances (mostly in the USA), but very little of the work of his playing group, The Theatre of Eternal Music, has been issued as commercially available recordings. This is a source of anguish to Tony Conrad, who played the violin in this group. He feels a large proportion of his work is tied up in a legacy of recordings which Young refuses to issue.

(Presumably, the MELA Foundation continues to pay for the cost of preserving and storing this archive of tapes). As ever the Sound Projector merely alerts the curious reader to these interesting items. The music is never short of amazing. In my less charitable moments however, I confess to finding the packaging and booklets of these releases somewhat precious. Make no mistake, these performances are 'high art', and the promoters are determined to sell it to you with certain attendant trappings and commentaries which to me, veer irritatingly close towards the pretentious and exclusive. The same feeling for me attaches itself to much work of the Fluxus Movement, with which Young was associated for a few years; Fluxus work looks like it might have been fun at the time, but now seems rather trivial. And I get the feeling there's a lot of money behind Young: the MELA Foundation, which is dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Young's work, and the Dia Art Foundation which does likewise for Marian Zazeela's light show installations. Neither of these creators lack funds to execute these projects, they are by no means struggling! My advice is to lay aside the sycophantic and self-congratulatory side of these projects, and concentrate on the music.

The Well-Tuned Piano 81 x 25 **Gramavision 5 X CD set, R 279542**

One record review can't do justice to this awesome work. I can only hope to draw your attention to it and urge you to listen. La Monte Young's music is more a way of life than just playing another record, and his outlook tends to refuse hollow consumerism; I don't suggest that by buying this box set you can put on Young's philosophy like a T-shirt. Make a commitment. This is a 5-hour continuous performance, recorded live on a specially prepared piano in Just Intonation. You won't believe the sound

this piano makes. As I've recently managed my third listen-through I discover even in the dying echoes of each chord, a complex network of phantom ephemeral notes and sounds. You will be carried along on a tidal wave of mesmerising clarity. An aid to meditation and prayer. A spiritual work. Sell all your goods and chattels (it costs £65-70) and do your best to beg steal or borrow a copy, but above all use your ears and listen to this.

The practical obstacles of performing 'The Well-Tuned Piano' are enormous - it requires a specially built Bosendorfer piano, and a performance site where the instrument can sit undisturbed for two weeks while Young tunes it. You have to admire the way he negotiates these difficulties, a bit like Christo and his monumental wrapping projects - setting an 'impossible' task and seeing it through, regardless of any consequences. Young's insistence on perfection means that if the rigorous conditions he requires can't be fulfilled, he simply won't take the commission. A pretty cool attitude, but a precious one also. Young can seem as delicate as a hothouse flower, which can only blossom in the right conditions. I think I prefer the more open attitude of a capable giant like Sun Ra, who in his lifetime managed thousands of performances, hundreds of records, and didn't mind getting his hands dirty.

Reading the enclosed glossy booklet, I'm struck by a delightful contrast. Young can describe with rigorous precision his theories of the physics of sound, his mathematical approach to composition, and extensive knowledge of the science of acoustics. Then he can go into aesthetic raptures over the very romantic, interpretative nomenclature he assigns to his Just Intonation Chords, such as the 'Magic Harmonic Rainforest Chord'. (A good thing says I - Stockhausen, for example, would strenuously deny such frivolities!) No less than four pages of the booklet are devoted to a sequential listing of all these fancy chords and their variants, expecting that the loyal listener will diligently track their progress and timings with a stopwatch. I've been too swept up in the music to even consider this operation, but next time in the Tate Gallery I'll take along a Pantone colour chart and use it to track the progress of a Mondrian painting.

The Second Dream of the ***High-Tension Line Stepdown*** ***Transformer [from]***

'The Four Dreams of China' **GRAMAVISION R2-79467 (1991)**

When I first played this I was in an emotional vortex, so my view has been somewhat coloured since. I have played it under calmer circumstances, and it strikes you with the simple clarity of an Ansel Adams photograph. Eight trumpeters use their muted horns to play this extremely minimal composition. Their breathy puffs are as much to do with the passage of air through valves as with the production of musical

notes. When enough notes are generated, there are moments of vibration that are simply beautiful. The piece is interloped with great passages of silence, which are equally a part of the composition as the rest of it - if ever a piece was made for the invention of compact discs, this is it. The long-winded title should clue you that this performance is just the tip of the iceberg - one part of a massive, mountain-scaled, unfinished lifetime's project. Cross-reference this with a large catalogue of unreleased Young compositions, all based on a very minimalist premise: the creation of long sustained tones and their resulting harmonics. The use of silence as part of the composition ties in to his quest for a 'timeless' piece of music. This composition refuses the traditional classical notion of a fixed, ideal length of performance; rather, it is structured as a mathematical equation, with precise descriptions of pitches and rules for how they are to be performed. Within those guidelines, the musicians are free to do what they wish.

Another, simpler view is Young's long-standing engagement with the sounds of the environment. A childhood spent in a log cabin in a rural community gave him the mysterious sounds of the wind rushing under the door. He responded with equal passion to the hum of telephone wires and electrical transformers, claiming these as axiomatic to his spiritual development. I too have been entranced by the sound of the rushing wind outside, when relaxing in my bunker in Dorset and I have the time to contemplate nature. 'Timelessness' is right.

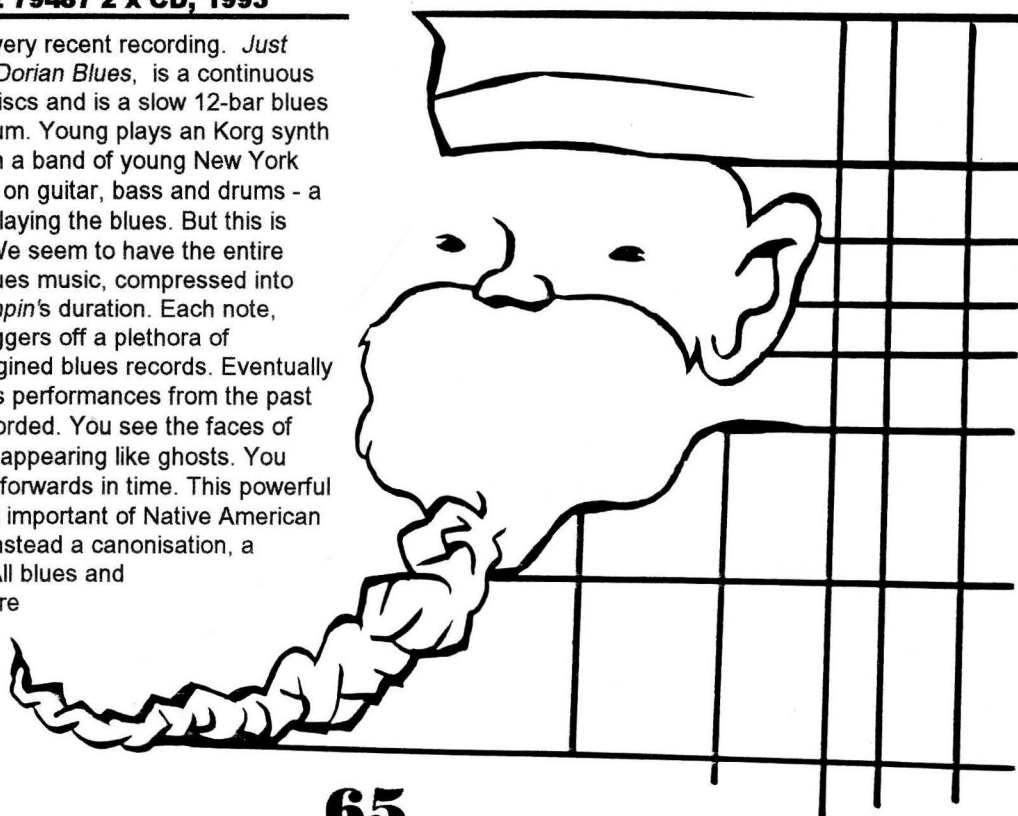
**La Monte Young and the Forever
Bad Blues Band, *Just Stompin', Live
at the Kitchen*
GRAMAVISION R2 79487 2 x CD, 1993**

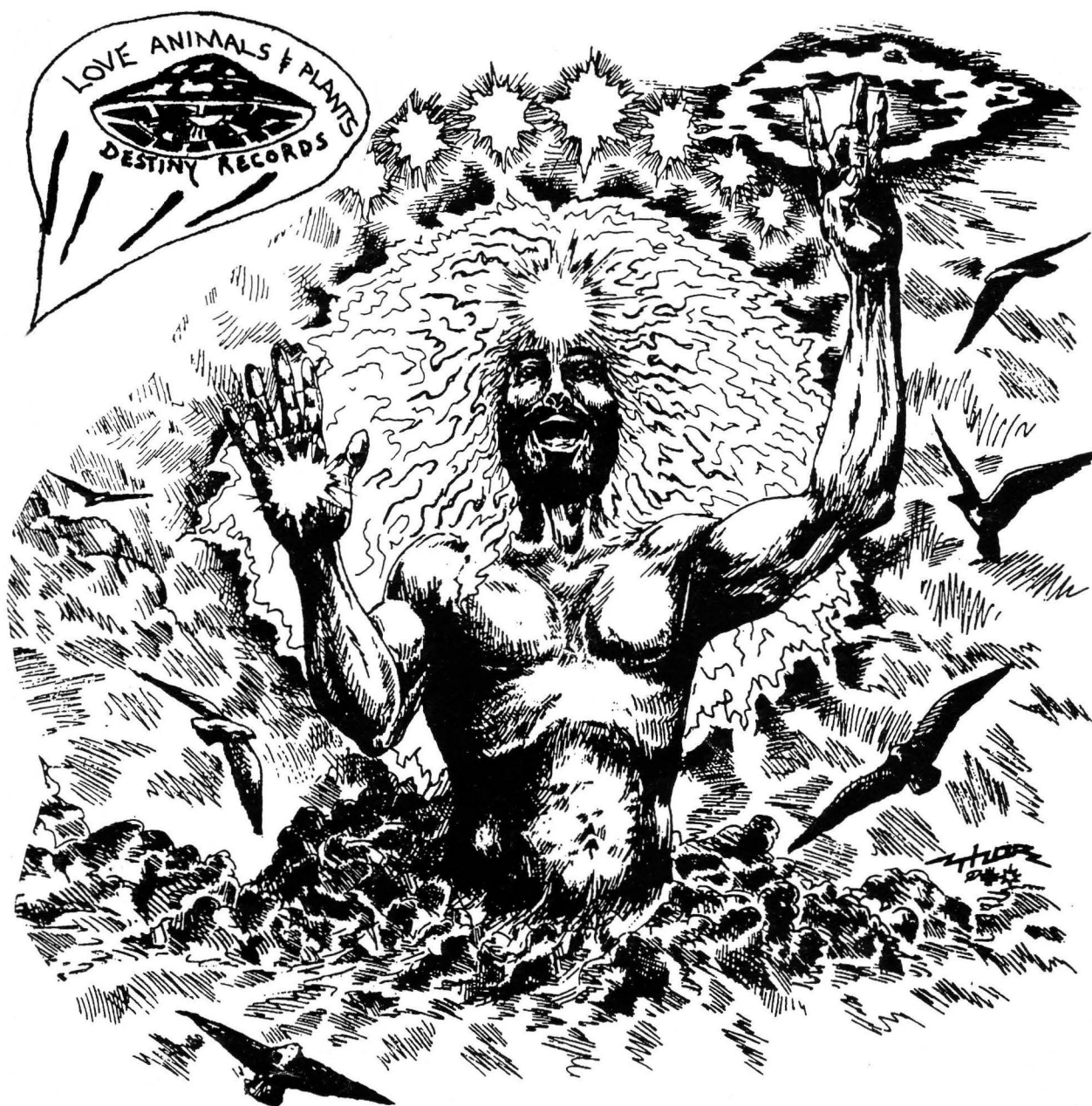
Another beaut and a very recent recording. *Just Stompin'*, or *Young's Dorian Blues*, is a continuous piece spread over 2 discs and is a slow 12-bar blues riff repeated ad infinitum. Young plays an Korg synth in *Just Intonation*, with a band of young New York enthusiasts / acolytes on guitar, bass and drums - a rock combo, in fact. Playing the blues. But this is something different. We seem to have the entire history of recorded blues music, compressed into each moment of *Stompin's* duration. Each note, phrase, sequence, triggers off a plethora of remembered and imagined blues records. Eventually you start to hear blues performances from the past which were never recorded. You see the faces of famous blues singers appearing like ghosts. You travel backwards and forwards in time. This powerful testament to the most important of Native American Musics has become instead a canonisation, a pattern of the blues. All blues and blues-based musics are drawn from the template of *Just Stompin'...* Forever.

***Chronos Kristella*, UK premiere
performance by the Kronos Quartet
27 July 1993 at St Giles Church
Cripplegate**

The string quartet entered and positioned their violins. When was the precise moment it began? When you looked up, the sound was just there. It worked its way well past the witching hour, like a midnight mass. Like the trumpet piece above, this was barely audible, punctuated by much silence, any sounds chiefly generated by harmonics of the strings. It was exceedingly uncomfortable on those wooden pews and the more we shifted our position, the more the seats creaked and rattled. In the tradition of Fluxus Art, this 'noise' was no doubt intended to contribute to the performance - by the selection of the church as a venue, 'written into' the composition as a naturally generated percussion track. After the first hour I was very tired, and in physical pain - the music was interminably boring to be honest - and shutting my eyes, I felt I was strapped to a metal chair which had come adrift from my spaceship. I was spinning around upside-down in space. Coming back to earth, it was a relief to find myself merely stranded in the heart of London at 2 am.

Stop Press: Whispers have reached our ears that the MELA Foundation now no longer exists, or has withdrawn its support for La Monte Young and his projects. Either way, it appears that early recordings of the Theatre of Eternal Music may be made available someday. If these appear they will be on the Table of the Elements label.





Bobby Brown, *The Enlightening Beam of Axonda*
DESTINY RECORDS DR 4002

A scarce and curious reissue of a scarce and curious item, which originally appeared in 1972. Like Harry Partch, Bobby Brown built and played his own unique home-made percussion instruments (designed to be as 'portable as possible'), and wails away on this recording with a six-octave voice to match Captain Beefheart and my beloved Yma Sumac. His basso-profundo is

indeed something to reckon with - it's recorded so deep as to make your speakers twitch. Overall a beautiful sound, intense and hypnotic, and much more laid-back in tone than say the aggressive electronic attacks of Silver Apples, the United States of America, or Fifty-Foot Hose. The lyrical content of *Beam* edges towards concept LP territory, alluding to a young man's personal spiritual odyssey, and quite honestly it's pretty banal in places, but the listener should try and see past this. The simplicity and beauty of the melodies sit well with proto-African rhythms and percussion, and you can lose

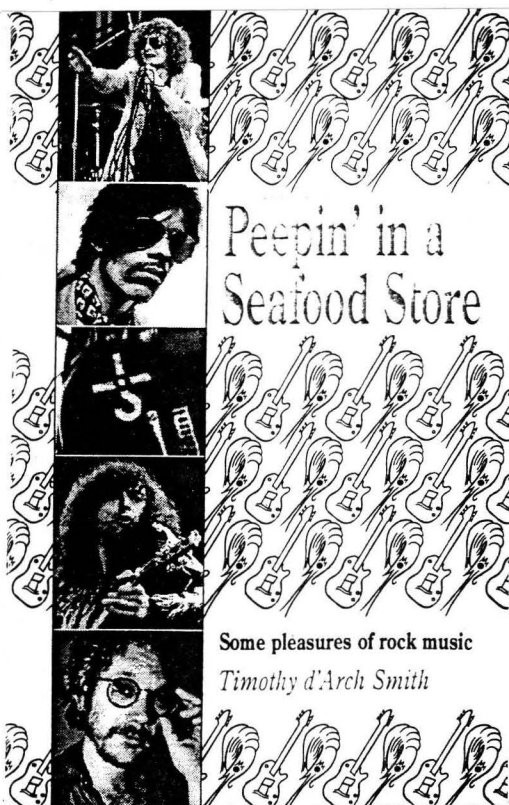
yourself in the sun-drenched sound that drips over you like warm honey. There Brown sits on the cover before a Californian beach sunset, surrounded by his bizarre devices, clutching his pet puppy with a beatific grin on his Aryan features. Among the most touching details is the fragment of sleeve note with the self-promoting advert: 'If you want me to play weddings or concerts, call...'. Listening to *Beam*, it's hard to imagine Brown's brand of eccentric noise as background music to your party, but then that's Hippies for you. They must have believed anything was possible!

**Peepin' in A
Seafood Store:
Some Pleasures of
Rock Music
by Timothy d'Arch
Smith**

**183pp, Norwich,
Michael Russell, ISBN
0859551776, £8.95.**

A true curiosity - Mr d'Arch Smith is like no other rock writer you have ever read. In this collection he sweeps the spectrum of popular music in the USA and the UK, carrying us from vintage R'n'B to Punk Rock, via Heavy Metal Giants, classic singer-songwriters and oddities like Blue Oyster Cult. Each essay starts life as a review of one specific record, but pulls in historical references so that each artist or band is situated in the correct perspective, clarifying the strands of development that lead up to the album under discussion. Tim makes deft, acerbic remarks on anything from the less-obvious shortcomings of Pink Floyd to the 'discovery' of Gary US Bonds by Bruce Springsteen.

d'Arch Smith's secret weapon is his ability to make astonishing connections between these disparate musics and a host of unexpected outside sources. These are chiefly gleaned from obscure literary works (Tim is a London bookseller by trade) and they turn your ideas about music upside down. A tradition of paedophilia-centred lyrics in rock is discussed, with dozens of cited examples. The Rolling Stones studio work for *Exile on Main Street*, with their army of underground musicians, is likened in one extended conceit to the degenerate activities of the Marquis de Sade and his cohorts' unholy quest for sinful pleasure. The fantastic world of Blue Oyster Cult's *Imaginos* LP is opened up and illuminated with esoteric references that Sandy Pearlman himself probably never dreamed of.



Some pleasures of rock music

Timothy d'Arch Smith

The author seems to have read every seminal and important book written on rock, quoting from them judiciously like an academic scholar, citing provenance and page numbers. Visual materials are also analysed: matching the semiologists at their own game, he refers the reader to published photographs of rock stars, teasing out their hidden meanings, illustrating precisely how a particular photograph of Jimmy Page enhances the mythology of Led Zeppelin. So is d'Arch Smith a non-participant, does he get it all from books? I personally find his armchair-ish attitude a refreshing change from the usual rock journalism approach, the tiresome 'I was there from the start' proclamations so beloved of many fourth-division rock critics. There's no denying Tim's real affection for the music here, a feeling reinforced by the touching exposition of his awkward youth and what music meant to him through difficult years. Even if his writing style is sometimes characterised by labyrinthine sentence construction and use of occasional archaic words to throw you off-balance, this too is part of the charm.

This book contains the most striking quote about Rock music to be uttered by mankind. It was said by Warren Zevon, and you can find it on the very last page. Recommended reading, especially to those who find the work of Greil Marcus intellectually unsatisfying!

**Meet The Residents:
America's Most
Eccentric Band
By Ian Shirley**

**184pp, plates, SAF
Publishing 1993, ISBN 0
946719 128, £11.95**

Certainly not the easiest subject in the world to write about. As the world knows the Residents and their work is shrouded in mystery and anonymity. In fact, that's the first stumbling-block for most journalists - the second being the fundamental strangeness of their music.

Happily, Ian Shirley negotiates those obstacles quite well, but what does he offer by way of new insights?

The facts are here. He's interviewed the right people, read all the articles and accessed private collections. Dates and sequences of events are all correct. He throws in the odd snippet of trivia for fact fetishists. Of course, as nothing is guaranteed authenticity, the patient reader must piece together a picture in broken images. For example, there are brief descriptive glimpses of the Residents at work recording, yet the image is shadowy and out of focus, like some grainy footage. The subject recedes from your intelligence, the more you try to find out about it. By collating a compendium of samples from articles and interviews, Shirley acts as a kind of seismograph - picking up approximations of the activities of some unseen, powerful force on the other side of the world.

That obscurity suits me fine and is highly apt for the Residents. Shirley doesn't offer many new insights or opinions; there's a

promising start when he gives us his shopping list of influences on the first LP *Meet the Residents*, which include Stan Kenton and Prado Perez (but not Yma Sumac, strangely). And like most true believers, he tends towards scepticism of the later, Midi-based electronic music. With his presentation of the known facts both here and in the USA, he stands on the brink of making some statement about the importance and meaning of the Residents' work, but he doesn't quite deliver. His knowledge of the West Coast 1970s scene is sketchy. He's on safer ground charting the 'discovery' of the Residents in the UK around 1978, but even here he tells us more about the state of UK rock journalism than about the Residents.

However, I guess attempts at interpretation can be problematic. Chris Cutler, in his *File Under Popular*, offered an excellent appraisal of their radical approach to the use of instruments and recording studio, something Shirley doesn't even consider; the nearest he gets is a photo of their early facilities. Cutler was coming at it from a musician's viewpoint. But Cutler also tried to make their subversiveness fit his narrow, oppositional Marxist strait-jacket; conversely, Ian Shirley quite rightly stresses the Residents' humour and playfulness.

A valiant effort, though the discography's a bit spartan (current CD reissues only) and the overall tone is sometimes marred by lapses into vulgar anglo-saxon argot.

**Krautrock sampler:
One Head's Guide to
the Great Kosmische
Music 1968 onwards
By Julian Cope
139 + [iv] pages. Plates.
LONDON, KAK LTD, ISBN
0-9526719-1-3**

With this and *Head-On* (reviewed next), it looks like Mr Cope is energetically extending his interests and talents farther

afield. He is, I suggest, cultivating himself as the last of the English Eccentrics - a project underway since he first appeared under a turtle shell in 1985 for the cover of *Fried*. Copey was also spotted at the Trafalgar Square Poll-tax incident wearing an enormous frog head. Don't forget *The Modern Antiquarian*, his ongoing survey of ancient hill monuments of this island, which recasts him as a peripatetic 18th-century gentleman gazetteer. Needless to say, he has always generated perversely twisted song lyrics that refuse common sense, along the lines of Syd Barrett.

I mention all these to suggest that English Eccentric Cope is also a great English Amateur. Take the fields described above - if we can dignify them with the appellations of performance art, political interventionism, archaeology, and dadaism. Cope is in not an 'expert' in any of them, nor I suspect would he purport so to be. His attitude to hill monuments, for example, veers away from scholarly research, little of which remains to be carried out anyway; and towards a highly personal take on the subject, of the Neo-Pagan earth-mother worshipping Erich von Daniken school of thought. If anyone is inclined to doubt this, let them bend an ear to a track on *Skellington 2*, 'Wayland's Smithy Has Wings', his enthusiastic paean to a monument in Berkshire not far

from the Uffington white horse figure. 'It was a star car! It was a star car!' he yells over a Neolithic drumbeat, following this exhortation with a fourth-form short story about a visitation from the stars.

The same enthusiastic amateurism applies to *Krautrock sampler*. Described modestly as 'One Head's Guide' - that is to say, one possible view out of many others - this work is (I feel sure Mr Cope would agree) a fan's-eye view of the records that came out of the scene, not a definitive, factual history of it. The production values of the book alone tip you off from the start - in essence, it's a fanzine with glossy covers and plates. Taken as such, this book goes down very smoothly and is an interesting and entertaining read. The histories of these important bands, and their members, is covered as well as space allows, and given equal weight to the aspects of the subject that really get its author salivating - gatefold sleeves, the extreme rarity of the records on vinyl, and obscure photographs of German hippies with incredible hair. And the music, of course. His extravagant, wildly subjective means of describing the experience of listening to German rock has had a partial influence on *The Sound Projector*. Cope's own personal history of exactly where, when and how he first heard music by Faust or Neu, for example, is as crucial and important to him as the history of those bands - and he deals with it accordingly. I'm all for it.

Just as Cope's forthcoming book on hill monuments should surely be read within earshot of 'Wayland's Smithy Has Wings', *Krautrock sampler* could be seen as an extension of 'GrimReaper is a Krautrocker', another track on *Skellington 2*. (Chapter 7 here repeats the phrase as a subtitle; it refers to an LP cover by Amon Düül II). On that track alone, Copey demonstrates audibly how Krautrock has radically mutated his sensory core. With the help of musicians Donald Ross and Shaun Harvey,



JC turns in a spot-on Damo Suzuki impression over a cozmik drone worthy of...well, actually it sounds more like a toy version of 'Only A Northern Song', but never mind. Music speaks volumes. After I finished *Head-On*, I felt a profound disgust and ennui with the Teardrops and rock musicians generally; but one listen to *Wilder* and my heart soared again. Contact KAK Ltd at PO Box 3823, London N8 8TQ.

The Skellington Chronicles CD, MA-GOG2, (comprising Skellington 1 and 2) was a limited edition mail order only item, available from the same address, although copies have been spotted on the racks, second-hand.

**Head-On:
Memories of
the Liverpool
Punk-Scene
and the story
of The
Teardrop
Explodes
1976-82
By Julian
Cope
MAGOG BOOKS
1994**

In the eyes of many Julian Cope is more famed for his screwball kookiness and instability than his music. Much of the blame lies with Copey himself - his lunacy often seems self-imposed, as if he once filled in a school careers-guidance form and chose the occupation 'Acid Casulaty'. His psychedelic heroes, Syd Barrett and Roky Erickson, were too truly gone to ever self-advertise so profusely in the press (and now in this book) such microscopic details of addled excess and sociopathic barminess. Simply put the Arch-drude of Tamworth has long been saying 'Look at me, I'm mad'. Either you slurp it all up, vicariously relishing the gourmet ingestion of hallucinogenics, the mock-Iggy torso-slicing breakdown or just feel frustrated that Cope's musical output has veered so violently between unimpeachable

psych-pop abandon, crystalline introspection and arrogant neo-hippy stodge.

This book reveals entertainingly how Cope achieved his ambition and maybe got more than he bargained for. It follows the heady up and down spiral from his later '76 arrival in Liverpool as an angel-faced Teacher Training student, headlong plunge into 'Eric's' era punk, brief pop stardom with The Teardrop Explodes, through to 1982's 'evil acid king' burn-out. The account fizzles out as Cope jumps off the careering Teardrops roundabout and flees to

the treasure trove that was the Probe Record Shop. Cope is very strong on what the discovery of buying records by Pere Ubu, Captain Beefheart and Can meant to him but is tiresome in bitching about his (less-talented) co-scenesters. This is old news, surely we all know Ian MacCulloch is a narcissistic twerp and Pete Dinklage was all mouth and little action?

Head-On's latter half is less engaging, Cope's world not as open to outside influences as he embroils himself in inter-band hatred and a mammoth drug

intake. The ribald saga of The Teardrop's 1981 U.S. tour is overlong but makes a lurid addition for fans of mythological rock-excess. I was interested, though, to read Americans regarded The Teardrop Explodes as an entirely psychedelic band, even meriting a large gift-package from the Grateful Dead of pure Claifornia Crystal LSD. Cope must have felt his Olympian

pysch-status was fulfilled and naturally scoffed the lot.

Written in a breathless, sometimes infectious, style full of goofy hippyisms *Head-On* isn't top-rank literature. But if you can plough through 249 pages of 'heavy stuff' and 'bad one's it reveals a flawed star with enough wayward ideas to ensure long-term creativity and cult public interest. 17 years on from 'Sleeping Gas' I still have one ear open for Cope's latest musical surprise and if you're ever needful of punk-ear documentation this book does make a nicely enthused companion to the more scholarly and wide-ranging *England's Dreaming*.

John Bagnall



the comfortable middle-class sanctuary of his parent's Tamworth home.

It'd slipped my mind just how teeny-bop BIG The Teardrop Explodes were in those brittle shiny days of Adam Ant and Bucks Fizz. A recent re-listen to *Kilimanjaro* reveals a pretty slick pop confection not as far from the Thatcher-pop of his Smash Hits compadres as you'd like to think. 'Reward' may nod to psychedelic quirkiness but is no less part of the early 80s zeitgeist than 'Vienna'.

Head-On's lovingly documented evocation of Liverpool Punk is the highlight: the thrilling moment the 'White Riot' tour came to town, the excitement of forming short-lived bands merely to try out daft ideas,

Ocean of Sound by David Toop

***Ocean of Sound* CD
(Various Artists)**

***Ocean of Sound 2:
Crooners on Venus* CD
(Various Artists)**

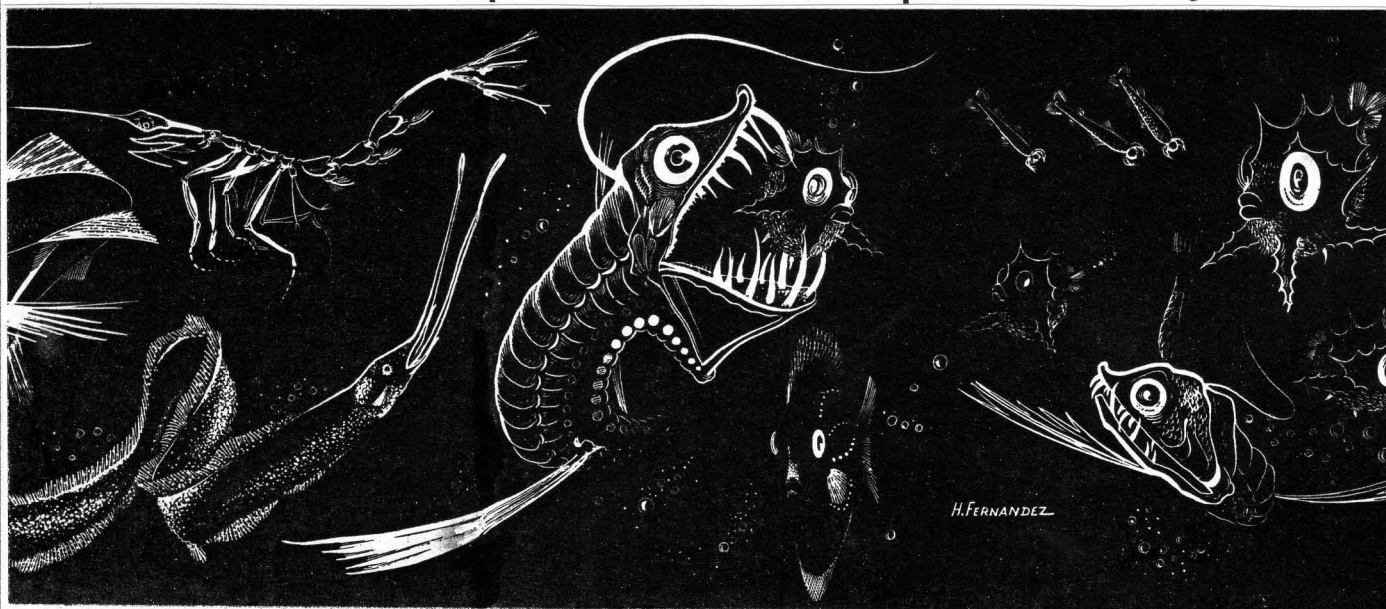
It's hard to think of any music that turns my stomach more than ambient dance. Bands like The Orb and The KLF with their *Chill Out* CD represent for many of their fans anti-authority behaviour and freedom of expression, partly by

make kicking a dustbin seem ambient and are expert at producing subtle shades of light and dark in their own brand of ambient music. Ambient dance is music with just one idea, that being to shove echo on absolutely everything! Even a supposedly straight ahead rock'n'roller like Link Wray came up with more interesting ways of making a song 'atmospheric'.

Such a sweeping damnation of ambient dance is probably unfair. In theory it seems to me that it has plenty of possibilities and if you

chronology of important events and Toop often makes no qualitative judgements on the various music and approaches discussed. It is left up to the reader to make the connections.

Unfortunately you have to wade through Toop's off-putting and often annoying arty/conceptual cyberbabble writing style, which delights in such phrases as 'soundfields' and 'tonal spheres'. But look below the surface and you'll see that this book is way more than the sum of its parts and is excellent food for thought for



association with the marijuana which they are intended to be consumed with. All well and good, but the problem for me is that the music falls far short of these ideas.

Found material crops up a lot in ambient dance. The sounds of insects, sheep and dogs, trains and planes, guttural throat noises, chanting monks and African gospel choirs are superimposed crassly onto dance beats. Aside from the fact that these sources have been done to death, the artists seem to me to have an unimaginatively literal approach to bringing the outside world into music, as opposed to the abstract work in this field of, say, Holger Czukay, Adrian Sherwood and Kramer. Similarly the music itself has as its spiritually deficient heir Pink Floyd's *The Wall* rather than Laaraji or Sonic Youth, who could

know of a whole host of wonderful records I'd be glad to hear them. But I think the aforementioned artistes could learn a lot from David Toop's book *Ocean of Sound*. This collects together under somewhat dubious chapter headings twenty-five years' worth of anecdotes about the experience of listening, from attending avant-garde concerts to sitting in the back garden listening to frogs, punctuated by discussion with interesting folk like Sun Ra and David Lynch. Toop takes a very wide view of what makes ambient music, drawing under its umbrella artists as diverse as Debussy, the Beach Boys and Les Baxter as well as music like improv and dub and in the process builds up something approaching an encyclopaedia of ambient experiments in music. The book does not present a linear

anyone interested in the possibilities of music beyond plain melody and rhythm.

Note: There are two double CDs available to accompany the book. These aren't essential for your enjoyment of the book, but are intriguing, if nothing else for the sheer diversity of material. *Ocean of Sound* features instrumental tracks segued with bearded seals, wind chimes and the like so you can compare the human-made music to the stuff made by animals and the elements. *Crooners on Venus* is less interesting, the title being more apt than Toop probably intended, as it contacts on the whole what I'd call soulless cocktail music with quirky vocals, amongst which Portishead would sit happily if that gives you any idea of what to expect.

Harley Richardson

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